

The Other World

F. Frankfort Moore

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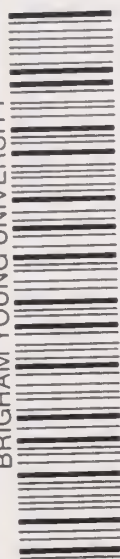
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THE OTHER WORLD



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THE OTHER WORLD

BY

FRANK FRANKFORT MOORE

AUTHOR OF

'THE JESSAMY BRIDE,' 'NELL GWYN, COMEDIAN,'

'THE ORIGINAL WOMAN,' 'CASTLE

OMERAGH,' ETC. ETC.

LONDON

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“This Other World is indeed not so far distant from our own that is ruled by the sunne and moon. Therein the Prince of the Power of the Air hath his dominion, whose servants are the Witch and the Warlock, . . . the Night hagge, . . . and those that some, for want of a better name, term Ghosts, Ghouls (breeders of sadde dreams), . . . also the Hob Goblin (himself a foul fiend, albeit full of pranks), . . . Lyars all, but dangerous to traffick with and very treacherous to Mankind. They lure to Perdition soone or late.”

DICKON PENHALIGON.

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“Black as he is Painted” appeared in ‘The Graphic.’ For permission to reproduce it the Author is indebted to the Editor of that paper.

A PROVIDENTIAL ESCAPE.

THE majority of the passengers aboard the steam yacht *Bluebottle* said that it was anybody's game. In the smoking-room — when neither Somers nor Norgate was present of course — the betting varied daily according to the events of the day. At first the odds were slightly in favour of Teddy Somers — yes, she undoubtedly gave signs of enjoying the companionship of Mr Somers. She had been seen by trustworthy witnesses standing behind him while he sketched with a rapid pencil the group of Portuguese boatmen surrounding the solitary Scotchman, who had got the better of them all in a bargain, within the first hour of the arrival of the yacht in Funchal Bay. Afterwards she had been noticed carefully gumming the drawing upon a cardboard mount. Would a girl take all that trouble about a man unless

she had a sincere regard for him? was the question which a sapient one put to a section of his fellow passengers, accompanying an offer of three to one on Somers.

But after a pause, which somehow seemed to suggest an aggregation of thought—the pauses of a conscientious smoker are frequently fraught with suggestions—a youth who had been accused of writing poetry, but whose excellent cigars did much to allay that suspicion, remarked—

“What you say about the drawing suggests that the girl takes an interest in him, and that would be fatal to her falling in love with him.”

There was another long pause, during which the smokers looked at one another, carefully refraining from glancing at the speaker, until the man who had offered the odds said—

“Do you mean to tell us that a girl’s being interested in a chap isn’t the first step to her falling in love with him?”

“I have no hesitation in saying so much—I could say a good deal more on the same subject,” replied the propounder of the theory.

Then it was that a number of the men glanced quickly toward him,—there was something of

an appeal for mercy in the glance of most of them : it seemed as if they were not particularly anxious to hear a good deal more on the same subject.

It is scarcely necessary to say, however, that the circumstance of their not wanting to hear a good deal more did not prevent the poet (alleged) from telling them a good deal more. It took him twenty-five minutes to formulate his theory, which was to the effect that it is impossible—impossible was the word he employed : there is no spirit of compromise on the part of a theorist, especially when he is young, and more especially when he has been suspected of writing poetry—*impossible* for a woman to love a man who has at first merely interested her.

“Love is a passion, whereas interest is—well, interest is merely interest,” said he, with that air of finality which a youthful theorist assumes when he is particularly absurd—and knows it. “Yes, when a woman hates a man thoroughly, and for the best of reasons,—though for that matter she may hate him thoroughly without having any reason for it,—

she is nearer to loving him thoroughly than she is to loving a man who merely interests her, however deep may be the interest which he arouses."

"I'll give three to one in sovereigns on Somers," said the man who had originally offered the same odds. He was clearly not amenable to the dictates of reason, the theorist said: he certainly was not amenable to the dictates of a theory, which, however, is not exactly the same thing.

"It's anybody's game, just now," remarked another of the sapient ones.

"Anybody's except the man's in whom she has become interested," said the theorist.

"My dear young man," said the professional cynic—he had scarcely recovered from a severe attack of *mal de mer*—"My dear young man, you're not a very much greater ass than most boys of your age; but you will really not strike people as being much below the average if you only refrain from formulating any theory respecting any woman. The only thing that it is safe to say about a woman—any woman—every woman—is that no human being knows what she will do next."

“Yes, but we were not talking about what a woman will do next, but what she will do first,” said the poet, who was not easily crushed. “Now I say that she——”

“Oh, do dry up!” shouted a smoking man in a corner, who had just rung for a whisky-and-soda. “I’ve heard more nonsense within the past half-hour than I ever heard during an entire year of my life. There is no sense in arguing, but there is some sense in betting. If you believe in your theory, back it with a sovereign to show that you’re in earnest.”

But the young man’s theory did not run into coin; though in other directions three to one on Teddy Somers was officially reported as offered and taken.

Two days afterwards the layer of the odds tried to hedge. The fact was that the girl had shown such a marked inclination for the society of Jack Norgate in preference to that of Teddy Somers, it seemed as if the former would, to make use of an apt phrase, romp in. But before the steam yacht *Bluebottle* had crossed the equator the odds were even, as a passenger named Molloy—he was reputed to be of Irish descent—remarked.

It was a pleasant company that had left Gravesend on September 10th, for the six months' cruise to cheat the winter (see advertisements) in the steam yacht *Bluebottle*, 3500 tons, Captain Grosvenor, R.N.R., in command. The passengers numbered sixty, and included singularly few disagreeable persons, in spite of the fact that the voyage was one that only people with money and leisure could afford. The vessel was well found, and her commander and officers were the pick of the Company's fleet, and possessed innumerable resources in the way of deck games. The report found ready credence in the service that Captain Grosvenor had gained his position through being the originator of deck-golf. However this may be, he certainly recognised in the amplest way the responsibilities of the position of trust which he occupied, and he never allowed any duty to interfere with his daily exposition of the splendid possibilities of deck-golf. He had started a golf tournament before the yacht had left the Channel, and he hove to for three days in the Bay of Biscay, when the heavy sea that was running threatened to in-

terfere with the playing off of the tie between Colonel Mydleton and Sir Edwin Everard.

The cruise promised to be all that the advertisements had predicted it would be. But before Madeira was reached comments were made upon the extraordinary scarcity of young girls among the passengers. Among a certain section of the passengers the comments on this point had a highly congratulatory tone, but among another section the matter was touched upon with a considerable amount of grumbling. Old voyagers, who were accompanied by vigilant wives (their own), foresaw a tranquil voyage, undisturbed by those complications which their experience told them invariably arise when attractive young women are to be found in graceful attitudes on deck chairs. On the other hand, however, there were several men aboard who had just sufficient experience of going down to the sea in steam yachts to cause them to look askance, during their first day aboard, over the deck chairs, which were occupied mainly by fathers and matrons. Yes, there was, undoubtedly, a scarcity of girls.

The fact is that such a pleasure cruise as that which had been mapped out for the *Bluebottle* differs essentially from the ordinary Indian or Australian voyage. On the two last-named, girls are to be found by the score going out or returning. It is not a matter of pleasure with them—though most of them contrive to get a good deal of pleasure out of it—but a matter of necessity. The majority of people who set out on a cruise in a steam yacht do so only because time hangs heavy on their hands, and they do not take their daughters with them, for the simple reason that their daughters decline to expatriate themselves for six or eight months at the most critical period of their lives.

Only six young women were among the passengers of the *Bluebottle*; of these only three were quite good-looking, and of these three the only really beautiful one was Viola Compton. It did not take the experienced voyagers long to perceive that Miss Compton would have an extremely good time aboard the yacht. With all their experience they knew no better than to suppose that a girl is having a good time when she has half a dozen men at

her feet, and a reserve force of twenty others ready to prostrate themselves before her at a moment's notice—when she is sneered at by her less pretty sisters, who tell one another that she gives herself insufferable airs—when she is frowned at by the wives of uncertain husbands, who call her (among themselves) a forward minx, and when she cannot snub the most odious of the men who disarrange her cushions for her, and prevent her from reading her novels by insisting on chatting to her on all the inanities which a long voyage fosters in men who on shore are alluded to as “genial.”

If to be in such a position is to be having a good time, Viola had certainly the best time on record even before the yacht had crossed the Line. She had about a score of men around her who never allowed her to have a moment to herself; she was bored by Colonel Mydleton's story of Lord Roberts' mistakes when in India, the crowning one being—according to Colonel Mydleton—the march to Kandahar, which he assured her was one of the greatest fiascos of the century; she was rendered uncomfortable for a whole afternoon

of exquisite sunshine by the proximity of the poet, who insisted on repeating to her a volume of lyrics that only awaited a publisher; she was awakened from a delightful doze after tiffin by the commonplace jests of the young man who fondly believed himself to be a humourist; she was sneered at by the other girls and frowned upon by the matrons, and she was made the subject of bets in the smoking-room,—in short, she was having, most people agreed, an uncommonly good time aboard.

The captain knew better, however: he had kept his eyes open during a lifetime of voyages on passenger steamers, and he could see a good deal with his eyes without the aid of a binocular telescope.

There could be no doubt that Miss Compton treated both Teddy Somers and Jack Norgate with a favour which she could not see her way to extend to the other passengers. It was only natural that she should do so, the captain saw at once, though he was too experienced to say so even to his chief engineer, who was a Scotchman. Norgate and Somers were

both nice chaps, and had won distinction for themselves in the world. The former was a mighty hunter, and had slain lions in the region of the Zambesi and bears in the Rockies: the latter was well known as an artist; he was something of a musician as well, and he had once had a play produced which had taken a very respectable position amongst the failures of the season. Both men were very well off,—the one could afford to be a hunter, and the other could even afford to be an artist. They were both clearly devoted to Viola; but this fact did not seem to interfere with the friendship which existed between them. Neither of the two tried to cut out the other so far as the girl was concerned. When Somers was sitting by her side, Norgate kept apart from them, and when Norgate chanced to find himself with her, his friend—although the tropical moonlight was flooding the heaven—continued his smoking on the bridge with the captain.

The captain was lost in admiration of both men; he reserved some for the girl, however: he acknowledged that she was behaving very well indeed—that is, of course, for the only

really pretty girl aboard a ship. The captain was a strong believer in the advantages of a healthy competition between young women : the tyranny of the monopolist had frequently come within his range of vision. Yes, he saw that Miss Compton was behaving discreetly. She did not seek to play off one man against the other, nor did she make the attempt to play off a third man against both. For his own part, he utterly failed in his attempt to find out in what direction her affections tended. He saw that the girl liked both men, but he did not know which of them she loved — assuming that she actually did love one of them. He wondered if the girl herself knew. He was strongly inclined to believe that she did not.

But that was just where he made a mistake. She did know, and she communicated her knowledge to Teddy Somers one night when they stood together watching the marvellous phosphorescence of the South Atlantic within ten days' sail of the Cape. A concert was going on in the great saloon, so that there was an appropriate musical background, so to speak, for their conversation. Teddy had said some-

thing to her that forced from her an involuntary cry—or was it a sigh?

Then there was a pause—with appropriate music: it came from a banjo in the saloon.

“Is that your answer?” he inquired, laying one of his hands upon hers as it lay on the brass plating of the bulwarks.

“My answer?” she said. “I’m so sorry—so very sorry, Mr Somers.”

“Sorry? Why should you be sorry?” he said softly. “I tell you that I love you with all——”

“Ah, do not say it again—for pity’s sake do not say it again,” she cried, almost piteously. “You must never speak to me of love; I have promised to love only Jack—Mr Norgate.”

“What—you have promised?—you have——”

“It only happened after tiffin to-day. I thought perhaps he might have told you—I thought perhaps you noticed that he and I—oh yes, you certainly behaved as if you took it for granted that . . . ah, I am so sorry that you misunderstood. . . . I think that I must have loved him from the first.”

There was another long pause. He looked

down into the gleaming water that rushed along the side of the ship. Then she laid one of her hands on his, saying—

“Believe me, Mr Somers, I am sorry—oh, so sorry!”

He took her hand tenderly, looking into her face as he said—

“My dear child, you have no reason to be sorry: I know Jack Norgate well, and I know that a better fellow does not live: you will be happy with him, I am sure. And as for me—well, I suppose I was a bit of a fool to think that you——”

“Do not say that,” she cried. “I am not worthy of you—I am not worthy of him. Oh, who am I that I should break up such a friendship as yours and his? I begin to wish that I had never come aboard this steamer.”

“Do not flatter yourself that you have come between us, my dear,” he said, with a little laugh. “Oh no; ‘shall I, wasting with despair?’—well, I think not. Men don’t waste with despair except on the lyric stage. My dear girl, he has won you fairly, and I

congratulate him ; and you—yes, I congratulate you. He is a white man, as they say on the Great Pacific slope. Listen to that banjo ! Confound it ! I wonder shall I ever be able to listen to the banjo again. . . . Shall we join the revellers in the saloon ? ”

They went into the saloon together, and took seats on a vacant sofa. Some people eyed them suspiciously and said that Miss Compton was having an exceedingly good time aboard the yacht.

Later on, Somers congratulated his friend very sincerely, and his friend accepted his congratulations in a very tolerant spirit.

“ Oh yes,” he said. “ I suppose it’s what every chap must come to sooner or later. Viola is far better than I deserve—than any chap deserves.”

“ It’s a very poor sort of girl that isn’t better than the best chap deserves, and although I think you are the best chap in the world, I should be sorry to think that Miss Compton has not made a wise choice. May you be happy together ! ”

“ Thank you, old chap. I must confess to

you frankly that some days ago I thought that you——”

“That I?”

“Well, that you had a certain *tendresse* for her yourself.”

“I! Oh, your judgment must have been warped by a lover’s jealousy. ‘The thief doth think each bush an officer’—the lover fancies that every man’s taste must be the same as his own. May you both be happy!”

It seemed that his prayer was granted so far at least as the next day was concerned, for certainly no two people could appear happier than the lovers, as they sat together under the awning, watching half a dozen of their fellow-passengers perspiring over their golf.

Mrs Compton—she was an invalid taking the cruise for her health’s sake—was compelled to remain in her berth all day, but Jack Norgate visited her with her daughter after tiffin and doubtless obtained the maternal blessing, for when he came on deck alone in the afternoon his face was beaming as Moses’ face beamed on one occasion. There was a slight tornado

about dinner-time and the vessel rolled about so as to necessitate the use of the "fiddles" on the table. It continued blowing and raining until darkness set in, so that the smoking-room was crowded, and three bridge-parties assembled in the chief saloon as well as a poker-party and a chess-party. Four bells had just been made, when one of the stewards startled all the saloon by crying out of the pantries—

"Coming, sir!"

A moment afterwards he hurried into the saloon, putting on his jacket, and looked round as if waiting to receive an order. The passengers glanced at him and laughed.

"What's the matter?" asked the doctor.

"Didn't some one call me, sir?" the man inquired.

"Not that we heard," replied the doctor.

"I thought I heard some one sing out, sir," said the steward, looking round.

"It must have been some one on deck," suggested Colonel Mydleton. "Shall I cut the cards for you, doctor?"

The steward went on deck. He was met by

Mr Somers, who, in reply to the man's inquiry, said—

“Call you? No, I didn't call you.”

“The infant Samuel,” said one of the poker players, and the others at the table laughed.

“It's raining cats and dogs, or whatever the equivalent to cats and dogs is in these parallels,” said Somers. “I got wet watching the *Bluebottle* show a clean pair of heels to a tramp. She's in our wake just now. I think I'll turn into my berth.”

He went to the bar and called for a brandy-and-soda, and then sang out “Good night,” as he hurried to his cabin.

The next morning Miss Compton appeared at the breakfast table, and so did Somers, but Norgate had clearly overslept himself, for he was absent. The captain inquired for him.

“He must be on deck, sir,” said one of the stewards, “for he was not in his cabin when I went with his chocolate an hour ago.”

“Oh, he'll turn up before we have finished breakfast,” said Somers, attacking his devilled kidneys.

But his prediction was not realised. A

pantry boy was sent on deck in search of Mr Norgate, but Mr Norgate was not to be found. A steward hurried to his cabin, but returned in a few minutes, saying that his bunk had not been slept in. The captain rose from the table with a well-simulated laugh. A search was organised. It failed to find him. The awful truth had to be faced: Mr Norgate was not aboard. Viola Compton was hysterical. Teddy Somers was silent; no one had ever seen him so deathly pale before.

Theories were forthcoming to account for Norgate's suicide—people took it for granted, of course, that he had committed suicide. Only one person suggested the possibility of his having fallen overboard, and of his cry being that which the steward had heard, for a part of the pantry was open on the starboard side. But against this it was urged that Mr Somers must have been on deck at the time the steward had heard, or had fancied he heard, that cry, and Mr Somers said he had heard nothing.

For a week the gloom hung over the whole party; but by the time the Cape was reached,

Miss Compton was able to appear at the table once more. She looked heartbroken ; but every one said she was bearing up wonderfully. Only the poet had the bad taste to offer her his sympathy through the medium of a sonnet.

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On leaving the Cape the bereaved girl seemed to find a certain plaintive consolation in the society of Mr Somers. He sat beside her in his deck chair, and they talked together about poor Jack Norgate ; but after a week or two, steaming from Bombay to Ceylon, and thence through the Straits to Sydney, they began to talk about other subjects, and before long the girl began visibly to brighten. The passengers said she was a woman.

And she proved that they were right, for when one lovely night Teddy Somers suggested very delicately to her that his affection for her was the same as it had always been, there was more than a little reproach in her voice as she cried—

“ Oh, stop—stop—for Heaven’s sake ! My love is dead—buried with him. I cannot hear any one talk to me of love.”

He pressed her hand and left her without another word.

She remained in her deck chair far removed from the rest of the passengers for a long time, thinking her thoughts, whatever they may have been. The moon was almost at the full, so that it was high in the sky before the quartermaster made six bells, and those of the passengers who had not already gone to their berths arose from their chairs, murmuring that they had no notion it was within an hour of midnight. A few of them, passing the solitary figure of the girl on her chair, said "Good night" to her in a cheery way, and then shook their heads suggestively together with such an exchange of sentiments as "Poor girl!—Poor girl!" "Very sad!" "Melancholy affair!" but it is doubtful if their hearts were so overcharged with sympathy as to interfere to any marked degree with their slumbers.

The girl remained upon the deserted deck and watched the quartermasters collecting and storing away all the passengers' chairs which lay scattered about, just as their owners had vacated them. When they had finished their

job no one of the ship's company remained on the quarterdeck. The sound of the little swish made by a leaping flying-fish had a suggestion of something mysterious about it as it reached her ears: it seemed like the faint whisper of a secret of the sea—it seemed as if some voice outside the ship was saying “Hist!” to her, to attract her attention before making a revelation to her.

But she knew what the sound was, and she did not move from her chair.

“Alas—alas!” she murmured, “you can tell me nothing. Ah! there is nothing for me to be told. I know all that will be known until the sea gives up its dead. He loved me, and the sea snatched him from me.”

The tears with which her heart was filled began to overflow. She wept softly for a long time, and when at last she gave a sigh and wiped the mist from her eyes she found that the moon, previously so brilliant, had become dim. Its outline was blurred, so that, although the atmosphere was full of moonlight, it was impossible to say what was the centre of the illumination. It seemed to

Viola as if a thin diaphanous silk curtain had fallen between the moon and the sea. Every object which an hour before had cast a black shadow athwart the deck—the spars of the mainmast, the quarterboat hanging in its davits—was clearly seen as ever, only without the strong contrasts of light and shade. The sea out to the horizon was of a luminous grey, which bore but a shadowy resemblance to the dark-blue carpet traversed by the glittering golden pathway to the moon, over which Viola had pensively gazed in the early night before Somers had come to her side.

She now stood at the bulwarks looking across that shadowy expanse, marvelling at the change which had come about within so short a space of time.

“My life—it is my life,” she sighed. “A short time ago it was made luminous by love; but now—ah ! now——”

She turned away with another sigh and walked back to her deck chair. She was in the act of picking up her cushions from the seat when, glancing astern, she was amazed on becoming aware of the fact that she was not

alone at that part of the ship. She saw two figures standing together on the raised poop that covered the steam-steering apparatus at the farthest curve of the stern.

She was amazed. She asked herself how it was possible that she had failed to see them when she had looked astern a few minutes before. The figures were of course shadowy in the strange mistily luminous atmosphere, but they were sufficiently conspicuous in the place where they stood to make her confident that, had they been there five minutes before, she would have seen them.

She stood there wondering, the cushion which she had picked up hanging from her hand, who the men were that had come so mysteriously before her eyes an hour after the last of the passengers had, as she thought, descended to their berths.

She could not recognise either of them. They were separated from her by half the length of the stern.

Suddenly she gave a little gasp. The cushion which she had held dropped from her hand, for one of the figures made a movement, turning

his back to the low poop rail over which he had been leaning, and that moment was enough, even in the pale light, to allow of her recognising the features of Jack Norgate.

She gave a little cry of mingled wonder and joy, but before she had taken even a step toward that tableau, she had shrieked out; for in the second that separated her exclamations, the figure whom she saw in front of the one she knew had sprung upon him, causing him to overbalance himself on the low rail against which he was leaning, and to disappear over the side.

She shrieked and sprang forward; at that moment the second figure seemed to fade away and to vanish into nothingness before her eyes. She staggered diagonally across the deck astern, but before she had taken more than a dozen blind steps her foot caught in the lashing of the tarpaulin which was spread over a pile of deck chairs, and she fell forward. One of the officers on watch, who had heard her cry, swung himself down from the roof of the deckhouse and ran to her help.

“Good God! Miss Compton, what has happened anyway?” he cried.

“There—there,” she gasped, pointing to the poop. “He went over the side—a minute ago—there is still time to stop the steamer and pick him up.”

“Who went over the side? No one was aft but yourself,” said the officer.

“It was Jack—Mr Norgate. Oh, why will you make no effort to rescue him? I tell you that I saw him go over.”

The officer felt how she was trembling with excitement. She tried to rush across the deck, but would have fallen through sheer weakness, if the man had not supported her. He brought her to the seat at the side of the cabin dome-light.

“You are overcome, Miss Compton,” he said. “You must calm yourself while I look into this business.”

“You do not believe that I saw anything; but I tell you—oh, he will be lost while you are delaying,” she cried.

“Nothing of the sort,” he said. “But for heaven’s sake sit here. Leave the thing to me.”

He ran astern and made a pretence of peering

into the distance of the ship's seething wake. He was wondering what he should do. The poor girl was evidently the victim of a hallucination. Several weeks had passed since her lover had disappeared, and all this time her grief at his loss had been poignant. This thing that had happened was the natural result of the terrible strain upon her nerves. Of course he never thought of awaking the captain or of stopping the vessel.

While he was still peering over the taffrail, her voice sounded beside him.

"Here—it was just here," she said.

He turned about.

"Good Lord! Miss Compton, you should not have left your seat," he cried. "Let me help you down to the cabin."

"Have you not seen him in the water?"

"There is no one in the water. In this light I would be able to see a man's head a mile astern. I will put my arm under yours and help you to get below. Trust to me. We would all do whatever it was in our power for your sake. We all sympathise with you. Shall I send a quartermaster for the doctor?"

Viola had thrown herself down on the seat where he had placed her, and was sobbing with her hands before her face. The man did his best to soothe her. He made a sign to a quartermaster who had come aft to register the patent log, and told him to send the ship's doctor aft. He had no notion of accepting the sole responsibility of soothing a young woman who was subject to disquieting hallucinations.

In a few minutes the doctor relieved him of his charge. Miss Compton had become quite tranquil. Only now and again she gazed into the steamer's wake and pressed her hand to her side. She allowed herself to be helped below in a short time, and did not refuse the dose of bromide which the doctor thought it his duty to administer to her.

The next day the doctor and the fourth officer had a whispered conference. They agreed that it would be better to say nothing to any of the other passengers respecting Miss Compton's hallucination.

"Poor girl—poor girl!" said the doctor. "I have been observing her for some time, and I cannot say that I was surprised at what occurred

last night. It is only remarkable that the breakdown did not happen sooner."

"I am glad that none of the rest of the ship's company heard her when she cried out," said the officer. "Lord! you should have seen the look in her eyes when she stretched out her hand and insisted that she had seen the man topple over. I thought it well to do my best to humour her until I had a chance of sending for you. I felt that it was on the cards that she might throw herself over the side."

"It was touch and go," said the doctor. "Ah, poor girl!"

A week had passed before Viola reappeared among the passengers. Her mother explained to kind inquirers that she had remained on deck quite too late one night and had caught a chill. The doctor bore out her unimaginative explanation of the girl's absence, and added that it was much easier than most people suspected to catch a chill south of the Line. When Viola was at last permitted to come on deck she received many tokens of the interest which her fellow-passengers had in her progress toward recovery.

It was not until the evening of her first day out of her cabin that Somers contrived to get a word or two with her alone.

He was asking after her health when she turned upon him suddenly, saying—

“Mr Somers, it was you who threw Jack overboard!”

“Good God!” he cried, starting back from her. “For heaven’s sake, Viola, do not say so monstrous a thing! What!—I—Jack——”

“You did it,” she said firmly.

“My dear child, how on earth have you got hold of such a notion?” he asked her.

“It was revealed to me that night—the night before I broke down,” she replied. “I had been sitting alone in my deck chair, and I was at the point of going below, when there—there on the poop at the side of the wheel astern, the whole dreadful scene was revealed to me. I tell you that I saw it all—Jack and you: I was not sure at first that the second figure was you, but I know now that it was you. I saw Jack turn round and lean against the rail, and that was the moment when you sprang at him.”

The man took some steps away from her.

He took off his hat and wiped his forehead. He returned to her in a few moments, and said—

“My dear child—oh, Viola! how is it possible for you to entertain so horrible a thought? Jack Norgate—my best friend!”

“You hoped to marry me—he is your rival—you murdered him!”

Somers flung up his hands with an exclamation and hurried down to his cabin.

The next day he came to her after tiffin.

“I want to speak a word to you apart,” he said.

She went with him very far forward. Only a few passengers were on deck, and these were in their chairs astern.

“I want to confess to you,” he said in a low voice. “I want to confess to you that it was I who threw Jack Norgate overboard.”

She started and stared at him. She could not speak for some time. At last she was able to say in a whisper—

“You—you—murdered him?”

“I murdered him. The temptation came over me. Oh, Viola, you do not know how I loved you—how I love you! My God! I

should do it again if I thought it would give me a chance of you."

She continued staring at him, and then seated herself by his side.

"You—threw him overboard?" she whispered again.

"We were standing side by side on the poop deck far aft, watching the tramp steamer on that night; the yacht was rolling—he slipped—I gave him a push. . . . I have lost my soul for love of you, and you think the sacrifice worthless."

"Oh, it is too horrible—too terrible!" she said. "For me—for me!"

He was silent. So was she. They sat together side by side for an hour. His terrible confession had dazed her. She was the first to break the silence.

"Terrible—it is terrible!" she murmured. "Who could have told me that there was any love such as this in the world?"

"It is my love for you," he said quietly. "It is the love that dares all—all the powers of time and eternity. I tell you that I would do it again; I would kill any other man who came

between us. But my crime has been purposeless ; we are to part for ever at Sydney in two days."

"Yes," she said. "It is better that we should part."

She gave him her hand. He held it tightly for a moment, then dropped it suddenly, and left her standing alone on the deck.

"Was there ever such love in the world?" she murmured. "But it is terrible—terrible!"

The next day she went to where he was sitting alone, far from the other passengers.

"Mr Somers," she said, "you will not really leave the yacht at Sydney?"

"If you tell me to stay, I will stay by the ship—I will stay by you, and you shall know what love means," he said.

"Ah," she said, "I think I have learned that already."

"My beloved—you tell me to stay?"

"I believe that you love me," said she.

"My darling—my beloved! You are more to me than all the world—you are dearer to me than my hope of heaven!"

"Yes: you have shown me that you are

speaking the truth. It is very terrible, but I know that it is the truth."

"It is the truth. And I know that you love me."

"I wonder if I ever loved any one else," said she, after a pause—"that is, I wonder if any one else ever loved me as you have done."

That was all that passed between them at the time; but two days later his hand was clasping hers as the steamer went past the Heads into the loveliest harbour of the world.

.

It was very early in the morning when he left his cabin to go on deck. The yacht was swinging at anchor. The sound of many voices came from the deck.

She was waiting to receive him at the door of his cabin. He put both his hands out to her: she did not take even one of them. She stared at him.

"I suppose you are the greatest scoundrel in the world," she said.

"Viola—dearest!"

"I say you are the greatest scoundrel that ever lived, for you tried to obtain my love

by telling me a lie—a lie—a horrible lie. You did not murder Jack Norgate. He fell overboard by accident that night, when no one was near him, and he was picked up by the ocean tramp which you had been watching—not beside him, but on the bridge. You are a wicked man. You told me that you murdered him, but you did nothing of the sort. There he is, coming toward us. I did not tell him how false you were, and I do not intend to tell him; but I know it for myself.”

“It was you yourself who suggested the thing to me,” said he. “Did you not come to me accusing me of having murdered him? Did you not say that it had been revealed to you in a vision?”

“A vision? Oh, I was in need of a dose of bromide—that’s all,” said she.

Then Jack Norgate came up with the captain by his side. The hand that Mr Somers offered him was limp and clammy.

“Here’s another of the ghost seers,” laughed Jack. “They all look on me as a ghost aboard this craft.”

“It was a marvellous escape,” said the cap-

tain. "Luckily the tramp was a fine old slow tub, and still more luckily she had a good look-out for one hour only. Why, you couldn't have been in the water for more than ten minutes."

"It seemed about a week to me, old man," said Jack. "And as for the tramp—well, we arrived at Sydney before you any way."

The captain laughed.

"It was a providential escape," said he.

"It was a providential escape," said Viola, putting her arm through Jack's and walking away with him.

“MAGIC IN THE WEB OF IT.”

I.

“I AM so pleased that it has come about, my dearest Madge,” said Mrs Harland. “I always hoped that Julian would take a fancy—I mean that you—that you would come to think tenderly of Julian. It was the one hope of my life. What should I have done if he had come to me with a story of having fallen in love with one of those horrid modern young women—the sort who are for ever having their names in the papers about something or other—charities and things? Charity has become the most effective means of self-advertisement in these days.”

“If he had come to you saying that he loved such a girl, you—you would have loved her too, you dear old thing!” cried Madge, kissing her on both cheeks.

“Madge, I’m ashamed of you,” said Mrs

Harland with dignity—the dignity of the lady with a grievance.

“It is of yourself you would feel ashamed if your son came to you with a tale of loving a girl—any girl—and you failed to see her exactly with his eyes,” laughed Madge. “But I know you are glad that your duty in this respect is so easy: you have always loved me, haven’t you? How could you help it? When I think of how naughty I used to be; of the panes in the greenhouse I used to break, playing cricket with Julian—panes that involved no penalties; when I think of your early peas that I used to steal and eat raw out of the pods; when I think of all the mischief I used to put poor Julian up to, usually giving him a good lead over; and when I reflect that not once did I ever receive more than a verbal reproof from you, then I know that you could not help loving me,—it was not my fault that you did not think of me as the greatest nuisance in the county.”

Mrs Harland laughed, though she had entered upon this interview with the girl who was to be her daughter-in-law very seriously, and in by no means a laughing spirit.

“I loved you always, because you were always a girl to be loved, and my prayer day and night, dear, was that Julian would come to think so in good time,” said she. “I was, I admit, slightly alarmed to find how very friendly you and he always were: every one knows that nothing is so fatal to falling in love as great friendliness.”

“Of course,” said Madge. “How funny it was that I should never think about the matter at all! And yet I feel that I must always have loved him, just as I do now. How could any one help it, my dearest mother?”

The fond mother of Julian Harland made no attempt to answer so difficult a question. Some mothers may be able to formulate on economic grounds how it is that young men do not find it impossible to resist the charms of their numerous daughters; but the mother of an only son declines to entertain the notion that he may fail to attract any girl who has had the good fortune to appear attractive in his eyes. That was why Mrs Harland fully acquiesced in Madge’s view of the irresistible qualities of Julian.

“He is a good boy, he has never been otherwise than a good boy,” she said. “Still—well,

I know that his future is safe in your keeping, my Madge."

She had heard of extremely good boys making extremely undesirable matches with young women in tobacconists' shops. It would seem as if every university town must be overflowing with tobacconists' shops, and as if every tobacconist's shop must be overcrowded with attractive young ladies; one reads so much (in books written by ladies) of the undergraduate victims to tobacconists' girls. She felt glad that her son Julian had not come to her from Oxford with a story of having made up his mind that he could only be entirely happy if married to one of these. She felt that he had been a really good son in choosing Madge Winston, the most beautiful girl in the county, rather than a snub-nosed, golden-haired girl from behind a tobacconist's counter. Yes, he deserved great credit for his discrimination.

"And I am doubly glad that you have become engaged just now," she continued. "You will keep him at home, Madge."

"He has never shown any tendency to roam again," said Madge, with an inquiring look into

Mrs Harland's eyes. “He has often said that having had his tiger-shooting in Kashmir, he is perfectly satisfied.”

“It was not that sort of shooting that was in my mind,” said Mrs Harland. “But his father was a soldier—my father was a soldier. Look round the hall, Madge—nothing but uniforms in every picture. That is why——”

“You are afraid that if this war breaks out in earnest——”

“That's it—that's it. He belongs to a race of soldiers. There has not been a war since Blenheim between England and any other Power in which a Harland and a Severn have not fought.”

“That is a splendid thing to be able to say; and yet Julian was content with his Militia. Isn't that strange?”

“It was for my sake, dearest Madge. I saw in his face before he was sixteen the old racial longing to be a soldier, and I made an appeal to him. He put his career away from him for my sake, Madge. He promised to stay at home with me in my loneliness.”

“You were able to make such an appeal to

him?" There was a suggestion of surprise in the girl's voice, and it carried with it a curious suggestion of coldness as well.

"Was it selfish of me—was it, Madge? Oh! I dare say it was. Yes, it must have been selfish; but think of my position, dear. He is all I have in the world now. What would life be worth to me if he were away, or if he were in danger? And then, think of his responsibilities. The property is not a large one, and it requires careful treatment. You don't think that I was unreasonable, Madge?"

"Oh no, no," said the girl. "You were right, quite right; only——"

"Only—only what, dear?" said Mrs Harland.

"What is on my mind exactly at this moment," said Madge, "is, that I—I would not have been strong enough to say that to him."

"To say what to him, Madge?"

"What you said—to ask him to stay at home when he had his heart set on being a soldier, as his father and as his grandfathers were. Even now—but what's the use of discussing a situation that cannot arise? Even if the war breaks out, he is only a Militia captain,

so that he cannot be called on for duty in a campaign.”

“Of course, the war will be over in a month or two, and there is no chance of the Militia being called out; but it is just for the next month or so that I have my fears—*had* my fears, I should say. I have none now that I know that you have promised to make him happy—to make *me* happy. I had my fears that at the first sound of the trumpet in his ears all the instincts of his house . . . Look at those uniforms in every picture round the hall. . . . Ah, I was afraid that he might ask me to release him from his promise.”

“And you knew that you would have released him without a word of demur,” said Madge. “You know that you would do so, for you belong to a fighting house, too. Bless me, I’m the only representative of civilianism among you all. Oh, it is high time that the fighting Severns and the fighting Harlands got a pacific element introduced among them.”

“That is what I feel,” said Mrs Harland. “Madge, you will not allow him ever to yield to that tradition of his house. I feel that so

long as he is by your side he is safe. One campaign at least will take place without a descendant of the Harlands having anything to do with it."

Before Madge had time to make a reply the gravel of the drive was sent flying against the lowest panes of the room by the feet of a horse reined in suddenly.

"Julian has returned with some important news," said Madge, glancing outside.

In another instant a man's step sounded in the porch, and Julian Harland entered the old oak hall with a newspaper in the same hand that held his hunting crop.

"It has come at last!" he cried. "War! war! war!"

"England has declared war against the Transvaal!" said Madge.

"On the contrary, it is Mr Kruger, the Boer farmer, who has declared war against Great Britain!" said he.

"Poor Mr Kruger!" said Madge.

"I am sorry—very sorry! War is terrible! I know what war means," said Mrs Harland.

"Sorry!—sorry!" cried her son. "Why,

what is there to be grieved about? You're not a friend of Mr Kruger's, mother?"

"I know what war means," said she.

"And I don't," said he.

There was something in his voice that suggested a sigh, and it seemed that he was aware of this himself, for he threw his riding crop into a corner, and cried out quite cheerily—

"I'm happy to feel all the springs of domesticity welling up within my bosom since you made me the happiest chap in the county, my Madge. I have no greater ambition than to sit in a chair at one side of the fire with you to look at, my Madge. How rosy you are, my dear. What is keeping the lunch, mother? We must drink together 'Confusion to Kruger!' His ultimatum—fancy a half-caste Dutch peasant having the impudence to write an ultimatum to Great Britain!—it expires to-day. We'll not leave the hall till we are sure it has expired."

He continued in this excited strain during lunch, and Madge found that she too was in the same vein. War was in the air, and while the crowds in London were cheering aloud and

singing "God Save the Queen!" with flashing eyes, the little group of three at the table in that old Somerset hall stood up and drank to the success of the Queen's soldiers in South Africa. Around them on the oak panels were the pictures of Harlands in red coats, Harlands in blue coats, Harlands in the demi-armour of the Stuarts, Harlands in the chain mail of the Lancastrians. Every man of them carried a sword and kept his eyes fixed on the living head of their house sternly, anxiously.

And that was why Julian, after drinking to the toast which he had given a moment before, remained on his feet with his glass still in his hand, and with his eyes looking from picture to picture as though he had never seen one of them previously in his life.

His mother watched him, so did Madge.

The glass dropped from his hand and was smashed in pieces on the floor, and he fell back into his chair and gave a loud laugh.

"That's Kruger!" he cried: "smashed!—smashed!—beyond recovery!—beyond coagulation—smashed—and without a Harland raising his hand against him,—that's what they are

saying—those Harlands that have had their eyes fixed on me, as if I needed their prompting. Come along, sweet womenfolk, and have a look at the sundial that Rogers unearthed when digging the new rose-bed, where the remains of the old maze were,—the date is carved on it, 1472 A.D. Just think of it, hidden for perhaps three hundred years and only unearthed yesterday, at the very hour that you promised to be my own Madge! A good omen! What does it mean except that a new era for the old house is beginning? Come along, my dearest.”

There was no great alacrity in Madge's response to his challenge.

II.

His father was killed in the Soudan, having inherited the property when his elder brother had been killed, a few years before, in Zululand. Four brothers, all of them men of splendid physique, had been slain in battle within a space of four years, and three widows and many children had been left desolate.

He knew the story of heroism associated with every one of the four, and he knew the stories of the heroism associated with the death of his grandfather at the Alma, and his great-grandfather at Waterloo. That was why he had taken it for granted from his earliest years that he was to be a soldier. It never occurred to him that there was any other destiny possible for a Harland of the Hall.

But when his mother came to him one day and poured her plaint into his ear, entreating him for her sake to think of himself as associated with a happier fate, he had yielded to her, though he made no admissions in regard to the comparative happiness involved in the fate of dying on the field of battle, or as a senile fox-hunter after a protracted run to hounds. He showed himself to be a dutiful son, and he went to Oxford and then ate his dinners at the Temple, as he believed a reasonably aspiring country gentleman should do if he wished to retain his self-respect. He had also drilled every year with the Militia regiment in which he held a commission, and was rapidly qualifying for the rank of major.

But during these years the country was engaged in no war that made any great demand upon its resources: he had no great temptation to go against the Afridis, and he felt sure that Khartoum could be reached by Kitchener without his personal supervision. But his mother noticed a change upon him as he read day by day of the probabilities of a war breaking out between England and the Transvaal. A strange uneasiness seemed to have come over him, and he talked of nothing except South Africa as a campaigning ground.

His mother became more uneasy than he was, and she was only in a measure relieved when one day he came to her, telling her that he had asked Madge Winston, the daughter of the Vicar of Hurst Harland, to marry him, and that she had consented. Mrs Harland told him that he had made her the happiest mother in the world; but from the chat, just recorded, which she had with Madge in the hall before Julian had returned with the news of the ultimatum, it will be gathered that she had still some misgivings.

They were strengthened by observing Julian's strange behaviour during the drinking of the toast. She saw the light that was in his eyes as he talked a little wildly about the coming campaign. She had seen such a light in the eyes of his father when talking of a coming campaign. She knew what it meant.

She did not accompany Julian and Madge when they went out together to look at the old pillar sundial which a gardener had dug up the day before. She was happily able to make a reasonable excuse for staying behind: a servant had just brought her a message to the effect that one of the lacemakers of the village had come by appointment to see her. She had interested herself for several years in the lace-making, and was in the habit of getting old pieces of her own splendid collection repaired by one of the cleverest of the girls.

This girl was still in the hall when Julian and Madge were driven indoors by a slight shower, and Mrs Harland showed them the piece of work which she had had mended. It was a delicate handkerchief bordered with rosebuds, and curiously enough, as Julian pointed out,

the sprays arranged themselves so as to form a constant repetition of the letter M.

“That stands for Madge, doesn’t it?” cried he.

“It stands for Medici,” said his mother. “This particular piece of lace belonged to Marie de’ Medici, though no one ever noticed that the rosebuds entwined themselves into the letter M.”

“I will buy the handkerchief from my mother for you, Madge,” he cried. “Who knows what magic may be ‘in the web of it,’ like poor Desdemona’s! These Medici were uncanny folk. The earlier ones certainly understood the art of magic as practised by the highest authorities in the Middle Ages. Yes, the M stands for Madge. Take it, dear, I won’t be so ungracious as to add Othello’s charge to Desdemona about keeping it; and if I should find it in a railway carriage or anywhere else in years to come, you may make your mind easy. I’ll not strangle you on that account.”

“I got it mended on purpose for you, Madge,” said Mrs Harland.

“You are so good,” said the girl, spreading out the filmy thing admiringly. “You know that there is nothing I love so well as lace,

and this design is the most perfect that could be imagined. A thousand thanks, dearest mother."

Julian seemed before the evening to have become quite resigned to staying at home; and during the next few weeks, though he followed the progress of the preparations for the campaign with great interest, pointing out what he believed would be the plans of each of the divisional commanders to his mother and Madge, yet he never seemed to be unduly eager in the matter. He seemed to look on the campaign in a purely academic spirit—merely as a *Kriegspiel*,—and his mother's fears vanished. She blessed the day that Madge had come to the Hall. It was Madge, and Madge only, who had succeeded in restraining his burning desire to be in the thick of the fight.

But, then, following swiftly upon the news of the arrival of the First Army Corps and the successes of the sorties from Ladysmith, which elated the whole of England for some days, came like a thunderclap the news of a disaster—a second disaster—a third! It seemed as if the campaign was going to collapse before it

had well begun. The change made itself apparent in every part of England—in every household in England, and in none more vividly than at Harland Hall. A change had come over Julian; he had no word for any one; he walked moodily about the house and the grounds, taking no interest in anything. He made an excuse for going up to London for a day or two, and he returned with a mass of news. The country had been taken by surprise in regard to the Boer preparations. The campaign was going to be a long one, and every available man was to be called out; he had it from good authority—the best authority in the world.

His mother saw that the old light had come back to his eyes, and she shuddered.

The next morning when Madge came downstairs she saw her sitting in the hall, with her head bent down, her son standing over her with a paper in his hands.

“Madge! Madge!” cried the mother, “you will tell him to stay; he is going to leave us, but you will tell him to stay. He will stay if you implore of him.”

“Yes,” said he, “I will stay if Madge asks me; but she will not ask me.”

“You will ask him—you will implore of him to stay, Madge, my daughter!” cried Mrs Harland.

There was a long silence. The girl had become deathly pale. She stood at her chair at the table. She did not speak.

“Why are you silent?—why are you dumb?” cried the mother. “Will you see him go forth to die, as all the others of his family have done in the past? Cannot you understand what has happened? Oh! you have only just come down. You have not heard the news: the last of the Reserves have been called out, and volunteers are being called on from the Militia!”

“And I have volunteered,” said Julian in a low voice.

She was still deathly pale. Her hands grasped the carved back of the chair. She did not speak.

“Dear Madge, you will tell him?” began Mrs Harland.

“Yes,” said the girl, “I will tell him that I

am proud of him—that if he had remained at home now I would never have married him !”

She walked steadily across the hall and put both her hands out to him. He took them in his own, and bent his head down to them, kissing each of them.

Then he raised his head and looked round at the portraits in the panels, and laughed.

He left the Hall in the evening.

III.

It was the most dismal Christmas that any one in England could remember. Here and there a success had been snatched from the enemy ; but the list of casualties published every day made the morning papers a terror to read. The British losses had passed the tenth thousand, and still Buller could not reach Ladysmith and Methuen could not cross the Modder. It seemed as if the last of the Egyptian plagues had fallen on England, and there was not a household in which there was not one dead !

It was a dreary Christmas at Harland Hall. News had arrived a few days previously of

Julian's safe arrival at the Cape and of his having taken part in a skirmish on his way to the front. Every morning his mother and Madge—who had come to stay at the Hall for another month—picked up the newspaper and glanced with fearing eyes down the usual casualty list. When they failed to find his name there they breathed again. There was no thought of festivity in the Hall this Christmas Day, and it was a relief to Madge as well as to Mrs Harland when bedtime came. Before going to bed the girl sat for some time before the fire in her room, with Julian's portrait in her hand, and on her lap some of the things which his hands had touched—a shrivelled November rose which he had discovered on the last stroll they had together through the garden—a swan's feather which he had picked up and thrust with a laugh and a mock taunt into her hair—the lace handkerchief which had been given to her on the day of the outbreak of the war. She sat there lost in her own thoughts—praying her own prayers.

Suddenly she became aware of an unusual sound—a sort of tap at rare intervals upon her

window-pane. At first she fancied that it was a twig of ivy which was being blown by the breeze against the window, but the next time the sound came she felt sure that it could only be produced by a tiny pebble flung up from the carriage drive.

For a few moments she was slightly alarmed. She quickly extinguished her candle, however, and then went to the window, drawing the blind a little way to one side and peering out. There was no moon, but the sky was full of stars, and she knew that if any one was on the drive there was light enough to make her aware of the fact. For some time, however, her eyes, accustomed to the light of her room, were unable to make out any figure below; but after waiting at the window for a few minutes, it seemed to her that she could detect the figure of a man in the middle of the drive.

She shut out all the light of the fire behind her and continued peering. Beyond a doubt there was a man outside. He was waving something white up to her. In another instant she knew him. A terrible fear took hold upon her, for she knew that she was looking out at a man

in khaki uniform, and she knew that that man was Julian Harland. And now she saw him distinctly in the starlight: he was making signs to her, pointing to the porch and walking in that direction.

She dropped the blind. There was no doubt whatever in her mind now: Julian had returned suddenly, and for some reason he wished to be admitted into the house secretly.

She stole down the broad shallow staircase into the hall, and by the light of the glowing logs which smouldered in the big grate she found her way to the oaken door that shut off the porch from the hall. She loosened its chains as silently as possible, and opened it. Then she went through to the porch and found herself standing opposite the studded hall door. There she paused for an instant, asking herself if she should open it.

A low tap sounded on it from the outside.

"I am here," she said in a low voice; "am I to open the door for you, Julian?"

"Open, Madge, quick—quick, I am wounded," he said.

With trembling fingers she unfastened the

bolt, opened the door, and allowed him to pass into the porch.

“O, my darling, have you been wounded?” she cried. She had not put herself into his arms: she had a sense of his being wounded, and she was afraid of hurting him by coming in contact with the wound. She felt his hand on hers.

“It is really only a trifle, Madge,” said he; “you will be able to bind it up for me, and you must not awaken poor mother. The shock of seeing me might kill her.”

They went side by side into the hall, and he sank down with a sigh of relief on the big settee before the fire. She broke up one of the smouldering logs, and it glowed into a great flame which showed her that his face was very pale and that he had grown a beard.

She was on her knees at his knees in a moment.

“Dearest Julian!” she cried, with her arms about him, “how did you come without sending me word? Oh, where are you wounded?”

“The arm—the right,” he said rather feebly. “It is only a flesh wound, I know, but it was

enough to knock me over, and it has been bleeding badly. If you wash it and bind it up a bit, however, it will be all right until the morning, when I can have it looked to."

Slowly and painfully he raised his right arm. He had apparently slit up the sleeve of his tunic, and the pieces fell away to the right and left of his arm, showing her a wound black with coagulated blood.

"My poor boy—my poor boy!" she said. "I shall do my best with it; but it is an ugly wound. Why should I not send a man to the surgery? Dr Gwynne will come at once."

"No, no," he said; "I don't want to make a fuss at this hour. You can manage without outside help. Hadn't you better light the candles?"

She sprang to her feet, and picking up one of the long chips from the log basket, lighted it in the fire and then transferred the flame to two of the old sconces at the side of the fireplace. As the light flickered on him she saw that his tunic was torn and splashed, and that his putties were caked with mire. No wayside tramp could be in a more dilapidated condition

than Julian was in. He had clearly been walking some distance; and yet she could not recollect seeing any clay for miles around of the same tint as that which was caked upon his garments.

She was about to ask him why he should not go upstairs to his own room where she could attend to him properly, but she restrained her nurse's instinct to ask an irritated patient questions. She examined the wound and said—

“I will wash it for you and bind it up till the morning. I shall get a basin in my own room.”

“‘A ministering angel thou!’” he said, with a very wan smile. “By the way, Madge, do you remember the lace handkerchief—the Medici handkerchief?”

“I was looking at it only an hour ago,” she said.

“‘There's magic in the web of it,’” he said. “Fetch it and bind up my wound with that cobweb drawn over rosebuds and I shall be all right.”

She hastened to her room, and in a few moments had picked out from a drawer some soft linen, a bottle of arnica, and a pair of

scissors. She had attended ambulance classes, and had confidence in her own capacity to deal with any ordinary "case." Then she put the lace Medici handkerchief with the other appliances, and, carrying a large china bowl with her water jug, came quietly down the stairs once more.

He had fallen asleep on the settee, but in an instant he was awake. He was plainly vigilant at once.

"It is beginning to feel a bit stiff, but that is on account of the bleeding," he said. "I knew I was doing wisely in awaking you only. I couldn't stand a fuss."

"I will make no fuss," she said, "and I shall hurt you as little as possible. I will even refrain from asking you any questions."

"That's right; I feel so sleepy," said he.

In a deft and businesslike way she washed the clotted blood from the wound, and she quickly perceived that it was only a deep flesh wound, but it had bled a great deal and that had weakened him. She bandaged the arm with layers of linen, and when the bandage was secure he cried—

“Now for the handkerchief—that will make me all right in a moment. The earlier Medici were, I told you, wonderful folk, though the later—— Ah, you are a good girl.”

She knew that he must be humoured. She made no protest against using her handkerchief in such a way.

“You have no idea how relieved I feel,” said he. “My dearest girl, I knew that I would be safe in your hands. Now get me a big drink of water and I shall be all right.”

She hastened to where a great cut-glass carafe and its goblet stood on the oak side-board. He gave an exclamation that suggested more than satisfaction while the water was sobbing in the throat of the bottle, and when he had drunk a clear pint he gave a sigh.

“I haven’t had such a drink for weeks,” he said. “Now, dear girl, I’m dying with sleep, and so, I fancy, are you.”

“You do not mean to sleep here?” she cried. “You will go to your own room, Julian, dear; a fire has been lighted in it every day to keep out any possible damp.”

“I couldn’t think of such luxury when so

many of my poor comrades are lying under the cold stars," said he. "Don't urge me, Madge; but go to your own bed and sleep well."

Even while she was still looking at him, he laid his head back among the pillows of the settee and fell asleep. She waited by his side only for a few moments, and then went quietly up to her room. She threw herself on her knees by her bedside and wept tears of joy at the thought that he had come safe home again, with only a wound that a few weeks would heal.

But when she had undressed and got into bed she could not help feeling that his home-coming was strange beyond imagination. He had sent no telegram, he had arrived with the stains of battle still on his uniform, and, strangest of all, his wound was not an old one. Not many hours had passed since he had sustained it.

What on earth was the explanation of all this?

She felt unequal to the task of working out the question. She felt that all other thoughts

should give place to the glorious thought that he was safe at home. He would explain everything in the morning.

IV.

When she awoke this thought was dominant. He was at home—safe—safe!

She listened at the door of his room to catch his cheery laughter with the first of the servants who might discover him. But no such sound came to her ears. She was nearly dressed when Mrs Harland entered her room.

“Well!” she cried. “Well! you have seen him? Good heavens, why do you look at me in that way? Have you not seen him?”

“Dear Madge,” said Mrs Harland, “your eyes have a strange gleam in them. What do you mean by asking me if I have seen him—*him*? Is there more than one *him* for me and for you?”

“But he came here late last night, he threw pebbles up at that window, and I let him into the hall and bound up a wound of his—a flesh wound only. I left him sleeping on the settee.”

Mrs Harland stared at her.

“My poor Madge!” she said. “You have had a vivid dream. How could he possibly have been here when not a week has passed since we got a cablegram from him? It would take him a week to get back to Cape Town alone.”

“I don’t try to explain anything,” said she. “Only he came into the hall as sure as we stand here together, and I bound up his wound—just below the elbow of the right arm. If I did not do so, where is the lace handkerchief? Here are all the things I was looking at before I heard the sound of the pebbles on the window, and the Medici handkerchief was there too. Where is it now?”

“Poor child! Poor Madge!” cried Mrs Harland. “You must try to keep your thoughts away from him for a day or two. You and I need a change of scene badly.”

“Oh, no; I am not going mad, I can assure you, my dearest mother,” said Madge. “I tell you that—where is the handkerchief?”

“There is the breakfast gong,” said Mrs Harland. “I believe you, dear; you were with him in heart.”

Madge laughed, and went downstairs. She gave a glance at the sconce in which she had lighted the candles; it contained four candles burnt down to the sockets.

The papers had no special news; but later in the day two telegrams arrived. One was for Mrs Harland, the other for Madge.

They tore open the covers with palpitating fingers.

The first dispatch said:

“*Flesh wound—very slight.*”

The second—that addressed to Madge—said:

“*Thank you, dearest.*”

They exchanged telegrams, but not a word.

.

He was invalided home after acting as escort to Cronje down to Cape Town, and saving a gun at Reddersburg (mentioned in despatches), but no one alluded to the wound which he had sustained on Christmas Day in a skirmish at the Modder.

One evening, however, when he was able to sit outside the house, Madge turned to him, saying:

“What did you mean by sending me that telegram, ‘*Thank you, dearest*’?”

He gave a laugh.

“I wonder if you have still by you that Medici handkerchief?” he said.

“No,” she said, after a moment’s hesitation, “I must plead as Desdemona did about hers, it disappeared mysteriously. I cannot produce it for you, my lord.”

“Ah, now I should get as mad as any Othello,” said he, “but on second thoughts I will refrain.”

“Listen, dear Julian,” she said. “I am resolved to confess all to you, though you may think me a bit of a fool. Listen : on Christmas night I went to my room and seated myself before the fire, thinking of you, dearest,—your portrait was in my hands, and on the table were some of the treasures your hands had touched, the handkerchief among them. Then I heard—I seemed to hear—no, I prefer to tell the truth—I actually heard the sound of a pebble flung against my window. I looked out, I saw you on the drive, and I went downstairs and opened the hall door for you. You were wounded just where you were actually wounded—and I bound up your arm with the handker-

chief and went to bed. In the morning there was no sign of your having been here, but—but—the handkerchief was gone. Don't think me a goose.”

“A goose? Heavens! a goose!” he cried. “Listen to my story, dear. When I was wounded in that scrimmage, I fainted through loss of blood, and when I recovered my senses I went in search of the ambulance tent. It was late before I came across a transport waggon, which had been disabled by a shell. I crept inside it, but found nothing there, and I was dying of thirst. And then—then—you came to me with bandages and water—plenty of water in the cut-glass carafe that stands on the sideboard. You lighted a candle, bound up my arm, and left me comfortably asleep, where I was found by our ambulance in the morning. Yes, that's the truth, and that is why I sent you the telegram, and this is the handkerchief with the stains upon it still.”

He drew the lace handkerchief out of his pocket and handed it to her. She gazed at it, but he only laughed and said—

“I told you ‘there's magic in the web of it.’”

THE BASELESS FABRIC.

“’Tis sorry that you’ll be to hear that ould Denny Callan is dead, sir,” said the station-master—he was, strictly speaking, the junction-master—at Mallow, to whom I had confided my hopes of eventually reaching my destination at St Barter’s, in the same county. He had been courteously voluble, and sometimes even explicit, in giving me advice on this subject ; he also took an optimistic view of the situation. All things considered, and with a moderate share of good luck, I might reasonably hope to reach St Barter’s House within a couple of hours. That point, which was becoming one of great interest to me, being settled, he thought that he was entitled to assume that I should be grieved to hear of the death of “ould Denny Callan.” He assumed too much. I had never heard the name of the lamented Mr Callan. I could not pretend to be

overwhelmed with grief at the news that some one was dead whom I had never heard of being alive.

“Tubbe sure, you’re a stranger, sir—what am I thinking of at all—or you’d know all about the road to St Barter’s,” said the official. “Oh, but you’d have liked ould Denny, sir, if you’d but have known him. A more harmless crayture you couldn’t find, search high or low. ’Tis a great favourite that he was with the gentlemen—ay, and for that matter, the ladies—though I wouldn’t like to say a word against him that’s gone. Oh, they all come away from St Barter’s with a good word for Denny. Well, well, he’s at rest, and I don’t expect that you’ll have to wait much longer for your train, sir.”

When I had got out of my compartment in the express from Dublin an hour before, I was told that I should only have to wait for ten minutes to make the connection that would take me on to Blarney—the station for St Barter’s—but the train which was reputed to be able to perform this service for me had not yet been signalled. After the lapse of another twenty minutes I began to think that the station-

master had taken too roseate a view of my future. It did not seem likely that I should, in the language of the 'Manual,' "attain my objective" that day.

I had reached a stage of bewildering doubt, which was not mitigated by the arrival at the junction of a long train, and the announcement of the guard to the passengers, "Change here for Ameriky,"—it was explained to me that the train was full of emigrants bound for America *viâ* Queenstown,—when the station-master bustled up to tell me that the Blarney special had just been signalled from Kilmallock—the Blarney special was getting on very well, and with good luck should be available for passengers from Mallow within half an hour.

The good luck on which this estimate was founded was not lacking. My train crawled alongside the platform only five minutes over the half-hour, and the official wished me a continuance of good luck, adding—

"It wouldn't be like going back to the same place now that poor ould Denny is gone, if you had ever been there before, sir. Rest his sowl! 'Tis the harmless crayture that he was. You'll

be sorry that you didn't know him, sir, when you find the place a bit lonesome."

I was half-way to Blarney before my sluggish mind was able to appreciate the contingencies suggested by the station-master. I had never before been to St Barter's, but if I had ever been there I should regret my returning to the place now that a certain person, of whose existence I had been unaware, was gone. That was how I worked out the matter, and before I had concluded the operation I had become quite emotional in regard to the demise of Denny. I shook my head mournfully at the thought that I should never see him—that I had come too late—too late! I had no idea that the local colour, which is associated by tradition with this neighbourhood, was so potent; but, indeed, when the obliging station-master at Blarney, who entered into conversation with me while the porter was looking after my luggage, remarked—

"So poor ould Denny is gone at last, sir!" I shook my head sadly.

"Poor old Denny! poor old Denny!" I said with a sigh. "Ah, we'll all miss poor old

Denny. He was the most harmless man—St Barter's will not be the same without him."

The station-master did his best to comfort me for half an hour—that was the exact space that I had to wait for the car which was to carry me to St Barter's. When it did arrive, the excuse given by the red-haired boy who had charge of the "wee mare" was that it was a grand wake entirely that Denny had last night.

He told me more about it (with statistics of certain comestibles, mostly liquid) when driving along one of the loveliest roads possible to imagine, past the grey square tower of Blarney Castle, embowered among its trees, and on by the side of the greenest slopes I had ever seen, beneath the branches of one of the groves renowned in history and in song. A broad stream flowed parallel with the road, and every glimpse that I had through the trees on both sides was of emerald hills—some in the distance, others apparently sending their soft ridges athwart the road. I felt that at last I was in Ireland.

On the side of a gracious slope, gradually approached by broad zigzag drives which follow the swelling curves of long grassy billows, the

buildings of St Barter's stand. They are neither venerable nor imposing—only queer. It seemed to me that everybody must have been concerned in their construction except an architect. But the compiler of a guide-book could, with every desire to be economical of his space, fill half a dozen pages with a description of the landscape which faces the windows of the front. The green terraces below the gardens dip toward the brink of a glen through which a trout stream rushes, and the woods of this sylvan hollow straggle up the farther slope, and spread over it in a blaze of autumnal gold that glows half through the winter. Where the wooded slopes and the range of green hills begin, undulating into a soft distance of pasturages, with here and there a white farmhouse shining out of the shadow of an orchard, and at the dividing line of the low slopes, the turret of Blarney Castle appears above the dark cloud of its own woods.

Before I found myself facing this entrancing landscape, I could not for the life of me understand why my client, who might have lived where she pleased, should spend half the year

at St Barter's. But now I understood, and I took back the words which I had spoken more than once, when in mid-channel the previous night. A family solicitor may be pardoned for occasionally calling a client a fool. I had called several of my most valued clients by this name. I did so for the same reason that Adam gave for calling the fox a fox—because it was a fox. But I had never to retract until now. “Hydros” are horrors as a rule, but St Barter's is a beatitude.

A couple of hours after lunch—the water which was placed on our table was as exhilarating as champagne—sufficed for the transaction of the business which had brought me to Ireland, and I was free to return by the night train. I had, however, no mind to be so businesslike; for the scenery had clasped me tightly in its embrace, and in addition I found that the resident medico had been in my form at Marlborough, and I was delighted to meet him again. I had lost sight of him for nine or ten years.

It was by the side of Dr Barnett that I strolled about the grounds and learned some-

thing of the history of the curious old place.

“Rambling? I should think it is rambling,” he said, acquiescing in my remark. “How could it be anything else, considering the piece-meal way in which it was built? It was begun by a very brilliant and highly practical physician more than fifty years ago. When the house, as it was then, was fully occupied, and he got a letter from a person of quality inquiring for rooms, he simply put the inquirer off for a week, then set to, built on a few more rooms, and had them ready for occupation within the time stated. This went on for several years. If the Lord Lieutenant had written for a suite of apartments he would have had them ready in ten days. That sort of thing produces this style of architecture. St Barter’s is the finest example extant of the pure rambling. But it is the healthiest place in the world. People come here expecting to die within a fortnight, and they live on for thirty years.”

“But now and again there is a death,” said I. “What about poor ould Denny? The most harmless crayture——”

Dr Barnett stared at me.

“Was it in the London papers?” he cried. “Oh, I see; you have been talking to the driver of the car. Poor ould Denny! He was everybody’s friend.”

“And yet quite harmless? The place will never seem the same to me as it would have done if I had not arrived too late to see Denny. Was he your assistant, or what?”

The doctor laughed.

“He was simply ‘poor ould Denny!’” he said. “That was his profession. It was pretty comprehensive, I can tell you. He was here when the house would be overcrowded with ten guests. He roofed a whole wing with his own hands. Then he dug the pit for the gasometer, thirty years ago, and he lived to dam the trout stream that works the dynamo for the electric light. He was also an accomplished *masseur*, and set up the hatchery that supplied the stream with trout.”

“His name should have been Crichton, not Callan. Anything else?”

“He could do tricks on the billiard table, and

he knew all that there is to be known about hair-cutting."

"Is that all?"

"That's all—no, stay! he was a sculptor's model for some time. I can show you the result of his labours in this direction, if you would care to see it."

"I certainly should care to see it."

"Come along, then."

He led me half-way round the building, from where the two storeys of the centre block dwindled away to the single bedroom sheds of one wing. We passed by the side of the terrace garden, and I made a remark respecting the fine carving on some of the stone vases.

"They were the work of the sculptor who chose Denny for his model," said the doctor. "Here we are."

I followed him between two fine cedars, and in another instant we were face to face with a very striking colossal figure of a man holding aloft a goblet. The head and the torso were very powerful, but the latter was joined on to a conventional Greek pedestal, at the foot of

which there peeped out four tiny hoofs of satyrs.

“What do you think of it?” my friend inquired.

I told him that I thought there was a good deal of strength in the modelling of the figure, but I could not understand the satyrs’ hoofs.

“I take it for granted that the sculptor left the hair unfinished,” I added; for one could not help remarking the roughness of the masses at the top of the head. The sculptor had merely blocked out the heavy locks of hair; he had made no attempt to define them.

“The story of the work is rather a sad one,” said the doctor. “The sculptor was a nephew of the man who built this place. He had worked in a good studio in Italy, and was, I believe, a pupil of the distinguished Irishman, Foley. He was devoted to his profession, and exhibited in some of the London galleries. But every one knows that it is very difficult to make a name—and a profit—as a sculptor, and he realised this truth only when he had spent the greater part of his small patrimony. He came here, and built for himself that cottage

which you see at the other side of the terrace, and, in order to keep himself employed, he carved all these vases and urns which you have been admiring. Unfortunately, however, among the doctor's patients at the house there was a wealthy linen merchant from Ulster—one of that vulgar crowd who had become suddenly prosperous when the American Civil War prevented the export of cotton from the southern ports; and this gentleman, meeting the sculptor daily, and feeling probably that he would like to pose before the world as a patron of Art, gave him a commission to execute a colossal figure to support a lamp at the entrance to the new house which he was building for himself. He made no stipulation as to the design, only the cost was not to exceed a thousand pounds, and the work was to be ready within a year. Of course, the poor sculptor was delighted. He accepted the commission, and, thinking of the artistic rather than the business side of the transaction, never dreamt of drawing up an agreement with his generous patron. Before a month had passed, he had obtained his material and made his clay sketches. Looking

about for a model for the figure, he was struck by the fine proportions of Denny, and had no difficulty in inducing him to add to his other occupations the more restful one of a sculptor's model. For several months the work progressed satisfactorily, and it was very near its completion, when the model contracted a malady which necessitated the shaving of his head and interrupted his sittings. The sculptor was not greatly inconvenienced, however. He turned his attention for some weeks to the carving of the pedestal, and got that completed before his model was able to resume his sittings. But even then the sculptor could only deal with the torso, for Denny's crown was as bald as an egg. In a couple of months, however, the doctor assured him that he would have as luxuriant a crop as would qualify him to pose for one of the artists who produce the advertisements for hair-restorers. The work was now practically finished. As the model remarked, the edifice only needed the thatch to be put on the roof to make it presentable. Then the proud artist wrote to his patron, telling him that his commission was executed,

and inviting him to come and see it. After the lapse of a week or two the patron arrived, and was conducted by the sculptor to view his masterpiece. The patron viewed it in silence for some minutes, and then burst into a fit of laughter. 'Man, dear!' he managed at last to gasp in the raucous accent of his native province—'Man, dear! what's that thing, anyway? Tell us what it is, if you can. A Greek figure? They must have had funny figures, them Greeks, if they had feet like yon. You must take me for a queer fool if you fancy that I'd let the like o' yon stand fornenst my house. You may make a fool of yourself as much as you please, but I'll take good care that you don't make a fool of me!' What could a refined man say to a brute like this? Well, he said nothing. He stood there in silence, with his eyes fixed upon the face that he had carved, and the patron left him staring at it. He stared at it all day, and the doctor, walking round the garden that night, saw him staring at it in the moonlight, and led him away to the cottage, and sent him to bed. He never rose from that bed, except once. Two days later,

his housemaid entered his room and found him kneeling at his window—the statue could be seen where he had placed it—where it now stands—and he was quite dead.”

I could not speak for some time after the doctor had told me the story, for I felt that it was the saddest I had ever heard.

“His heart was broken,” I said. “But perhaps you will tell me that science has proved that such a rupture is impossible.”

“I will tell you nothing of the sort,” said he. “A broken heart is the best possible way to describe the effect upon a sensitive brain of such a shock as the sculptor sustained. His heart was broken. I am sorry that I hadn’t a livelier story for you. People come to Ireland expecting to be amused; but it seems to me that the history of the island from the earliest times is one prolonged lament. The finest music of the national melodies is to be found in the most mournful.”

I stood with my eyes fixed upon the statue.

“Strange, isn’t it, that I should arrive here to be told that pitiful story within an hour or two of the death of the model?” said I. “The

poor artist ! I am sure that he felt that he was immortalising Denny ; and yet—I suppose that in a year or two no one will know anything either of the sculptor or his model. Perhaps the vulgarity of the Ulster patron is, after all, the most enduring of all the qualities that went to the production of this work.”

“The patron eventually became one of the most distinguished bankrupts of his generation,” said Dr Barnett. “He died a few years ago, but vulgarity did not die with him. Yes, I think you are right—vulgarity is immortal.”

“I wonder if our friend Denny was proud to be reproduced in the stone, or was he mortified at the result of his first connection with art ?” I remarked, while we were strolling back to the house.

“He took an interest in the thing up to the very last,” replied the doctor. “I have often seen him take a surreptitious glance at it, and pass away from it, stroking his head mournfully. He confided in me once that his sorrow was that the sculptor had not lived to reproduce his fine head of hair ; and I know that he believed that it was the unfinished state of the

crown of the figure that brought about its rejection. His widow told me only yesterday that this was the greatest trouble of his last hours. You see, the figure was a record of his early manhood, but the pride that he had in looking at it must have been chastened by the feeling that it did not do justice to his curls—his one vanity was his curly head. He was nicknamed in Irish ‘The curly-headed boy.’ It was pathetic to hear his widow repeat the phrase over his body when I visited her in her trouble yesterday. ‘He was my curly-headed boy—my curly-headed boy will never know the touch of my comb again!’ she wailed in Irish.”

“Poor old Denny!” said I.

“That seems by one consent to be his most appropriate epitaph,” said the doctor.

After dinner that night I played a very pleasant rubber of whist with my client, and the doctor and his wife. When the party separated I went to the billiard-room with Barnett, and we played a hundred up. Lighting a cigar then, I strolled out alone upon the terrace, the doctor having gone to his room. The night was a brilliant one, and the land-

scape lay bare and white beneath the moonlight, which flooded the far-off hills and spread a garment of filigree over the foliage of the glen and of the slope beyond. Beneath its brilliance the trout stream, whose voice came fitfully through the brooding silence of the night, flashed here and there among the trees. The square tower of the Castle shone like marble in the distance. From one of the farms of the hillside the faint sound of a dog's bark reached my ears.

I seated myself on one of the terrace chairs, languidly smoking my cigar and breathing the strong perfume of the stocks of the garden. I confess that my mind was dwelling upon the story of that queer piece of sculpture before which I had stood in the afternoon. It was as sad a story as that of the poet Keats, only the brutal criticism of the sculptor's patron was more savage than the 'Quarterly Review' which had bludgeoned the fine poet to the death. But my sympathy was not given to the artist so fully as to leave no pity to bestow upon his model, who had lived on for thirty or forty years with his humble grievance. I could

appreciate the feelings of poor old Denny all the years that he had laboured beneath the burden of being handed down in effigy to coming generations shorn of his greatest glory. The one who was known to all men as the curly-haired boy was doomed to stand before the eyes of all comers as the possessor of shapeless, matted locks that were not locks at all !

He was not made of the same fibre as the artist ; he had not broken down beneath the weight of that reflection ; but I knew it must have been a heaviness to him all his days.

I remained seated in the moonlight for a long time, and just as I thought that I should turn in, I noticed a figure crossing the little grassy slope toward the garden. It was, I perceived, the figure of a man, and he was wearing what I took at first to be an ordinary night suit of light silk ; but before he had gone a dozen steps I perceived that his garment was a painter's blouse. He moved silently over the grass, and I could not help feeling, as I had often done before, how a glance of moonlight on a figure may produce such an effect of

mystery as can never be gained in daylight. I assumed that the object which was passing away among the flower-beds was one of the household staff on duty—a watchman, it might be, or a gardener going to regulate the heating apparatus in a greenhouse. And yet, looking at him from my seat, he seemed as weird and unsubstantial as a whiff of mountain mist.

I rose from my place, and was about to walk round to the entrance to the house and get to bed, when I became aware of another figure moving through the moonlight along the grassy terrace. I gave an exclamation of surprise when I saw that this one was half nude and white—white as the stone of the statue beyond the trees—there, it moved—*the statue itself*—I saw it—the figure of the man with his hands held aloft—the features were the same—the proportions of the body—only this one was more perfect than the other, for he had a mass of curly locks clustering over his head like the curls of the Herakles of the Vatican.

And even while I stood there watching him, the figure passed away among the trees.

I waited in such a state of amazement as I

had never experienced before. I had the sensation of being newly awakened; but I knew that I had not fallen asleep for a moment. I was not afraid; only, finding myself in a situation to which I was unaccustomed, I did not know what I should do. It took me some minutes to collect myself.

Through the stillness I became aware of a curious dull tapping sound—there it went, tap, tap, tap; then a slight pause, and again tap, tap, tap, tap.

A dog behind the house gave a prolonged howl, and along the path below me a fox-terrier, which I had seen during the day, scurried, its tail between its legs, and every limb trembling.

“Tap, tap, tap”—a pause—“tap, tap, tap, tap.”

My mind was made up. I went cautiously along the terrace in the direction of the garden. I found myself walking stealthily on my toes, as though I was anxious not to disturb someone who was desirous of quiet; and as I went on, the sounds of the tapping became more distinct. Almost before I knew it, I reached that part of

the grassy terrace which commanded a view of the garden ; and in an instant I was standing still. I could hear the beating of my own heart as I saw, under my very eyes, not twenty yards away, three figures, equally white and shadowy.

The nearest to me was of the half-naked man with the head of curls ; the one in the middle was in exactly the same posture—it was the figure of the statue ; and the third was the one which I had seen wearing the long white blouse, and this was the only one of the three that moved. He was standing, as it seemed, on the ledge of the pedestal, and a sculptor's chisel was in one hand and a mallet in the other. He was working at the head of the statue, every now and again glancing at the head of the model, pausing while he did so, and beginning to work again after the lapse of a second or two.

I stood there on the terrace watching this strange scene, and the curious part of it was that it did not seem in the least degree curious to me while it was being enacted. On the contrary, I had a distinct sense of harmony—of artistic finish—the pleasurable sensation of

which one is conscious on the completion of the *leit motif* of a symphony,—that is how I can best express what my feelings were at the time. During the hour that I remained there it never occurred to me that I should draw any nearer to the shadowy group. As a matter of fact, I believe that there was uppermost in my mind an apprehension that it was necessary for me to keep very still, lest I should interfere with the work. I have had precisely the same feeling when in the studio of a painter while he was at work and I was watching him. But I could not leave the place where I stood, so long as that scene was being enacted in the silence, and the three figures were equally silent. The night knew no sound except that caused by the chiselling of the stone.

An hour must have passed—perhaps more than an hour—and then, still in silence, the sculptor threw his chisel and his mallet to the ground. I heard the little thud which each gave on the turf. Then he sprang to the ground; but his feet made no sound in alighting. I stood on the terrace and watched him and his model move away across the garden as

silently as they had come, and disappear among the trees at the entrance to the glen.

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The next morning when I had breakfasted I sought my friend Dr Barnett, and told him my experience of the night. He did not smile. But he was strictly scientific. We were smoking together on one of the paths bordered by laurels, and when I had told him all that I had to tell, he put his hand on my arm, saying—

“My dear boy, the phenomena of ghosts are invariably interesting, and, on the whole, not more perplexing than other natural phenomena. Sometimes they are due to one cause, sometimes to another. Most frequently they must be attributed to the projection of an image upon the eye from within, not from without. Now, in your case—but we had better stroll round to the scene of your illusion.”

We went together across the lawn in the direction of the companion cedars, and he continued his discourse.

“All that you have told me interests me greatly, showing as it does how, under certain conditions, the most admirably balanced brain

may become what I may call sensitised—susceptible as a photographic plate to an image——”

At this point his speech was arrested. We had passed between the cedars, and the statue was facing us. The doctor was gazing up at it.

“Good heavens !” he said in a whisper ; “he has finished it !”

I looked up and saw that the head of the figure was covered with curls.

“He has finished it—he has finished it,” the doctor whispered again.

“Yes,” I said, “he has finished it. I saw him do it.”

BLACK AS HE IS PAINTED.

I.

THE houses which constitute the town of Picotee—in the Gambia region a commendable liberality of spirit prevails as to the requisite elements of a town—were glistening beneath the intolerable rays of the afternoon sun. To the eyes of all aboard the mail steamer *Penguin*, which had just run up a blue-peter in the anchorage, the town seemed of dazzling whiteness. It was only the inhabitants of Picotee who knew that the walls of the houses were not white, but of a sickly yellow tinge; consequently, it was only the inhabitants who knew how inappropriate it was to allude to their town as the “whited sepulchre”—a term of reproach which was frequently levelled against it rather on account of the appalling percentage

of mortality among its inhabitants than by reason of the spotlessness of the walls, though they did appear spotless when viewed from the sea. In the saloon of the *Penguin* the thermometer registered 95°, and when the passengers complained to the captain of the steamer respecting the temperature, holding him personally responsible for every degree that it rose above 70°, he pointed across the dazzling blue waters of the anchorage to where the town was painfully glistening, and asked his complainants how they would like to be there.

It was universally believed that when the captain had put this inquiry, the last word had been said regarding the temperature : he, at any rate, seemed to fancy that he had relieved himself from all responsibility in the matter.

At Picotee things were going on pretty much as usual. But what is progress at Picotee would be regarded as stagnation elsewhere.

There was a fine suggestion of repose about the Kroomen who were dozing in unpicturesque attitudes in the shade of the palms on the ridge nearest to the beach ; and even Mr Caractacus Brown, who, being one of the merchants of the

place,—he sold parrots to the sailors, and would accept a contract for green monkeys from the more ambitious collectors of the fauna of the West Coast,—was not supposed to give way to such weaknesses as were exhibited by the Kroomen—even Mr Caractacus Brown wiped his woolly head and admitted to his neighbour, Mr Coriolanus White, that the day was warm. Having seen Coriolanus selling liquid lard by the spoonful, he could scarcely do otherwise than admit that the temperature was high. Devonshire cream was solid in comparison with the lard sold at Picotee. But, in spite of the heat, a pepper-bird was warbling among the bananas, and its song broke the monotony of the roar of the great rollers that broke upon the beach—a roar that varies but that never ends in the ears of the people of Picotee.

Dr Claude Koomadhi, who occupied a villa built on the lovely green slope above the town, opened the shutters of the room in which he sat, and listened to the song of the pepper-bird. Upon his features, which seemed as if they were carved out of black oak and delicately polished, a sentimental expression appeared. His eyes

showed a large proportion of white as he sighed and remarked to his servant, who brought him a glass of iced cocoanut milk, that the song of the pepper-bird reminded him of home.

“Of ’ome, sah?” said the old woman. “Lor’ bress yah, sah! dere ain’t no peppah-buds at Ashantee.”

Dr Koomadhi’s eyes no longer wore a sentimental expression. They flashed when the old woman had spoken, but she did not notice this circumstance. She only laid down the tumbler on the table, hitched up her crimson shawl, and roared with negress’ laughter.

“You don’t understand, Sally. I said home—England,” remarked the doctor.

“Oh, beg pardung, sah; thought yah ’looded to Ashantee,” said the old woman as she rolled out of the room, still uttering that senseless laugh.

Dr Koomadhi did not seem to be greatly put out by that reminder of the fact that Ashantee was his birthplace. He threw himself back in his cane chair and took a sip from the tumbler. He then resumed his perusal of the ‘Satur-

day Review' brought by the *Penguin* in the morning.

He did not get through many pages. He shook his head gravely. He could not approve of the tone of the political article. It suggested compromise. It was not Conservative enough for Dr Koomadhi. He began to fear that he must give up the 'Saturday.' It was clearly temporising with the enemy. This would not do for Dr Koomadhi.

He took another sip of cocoanut milk, and then began pacing the room. He was clearly restless in his mind; but, perhaps, it would be going too far to suggest that he was perturbed owing to the spirit of compromise displayed in the political article which he had just read. No; though a staunch Conservative, he was still susceptible of a passion beyond the patriotic desire to assist in maintaining the integrity of the Empire. This was the origin of his uneasiness. He had been awake all the previous night thinking over his past life, and trying to think out his future. The conclusion to which he had come was that as he had successfully overthrown all the obstacles which had been in his

path to success in the past, there was no reason why he might not overthrow all that might threaten to bar his progress in the future. But, in spite of having come to this conclusion, he was very uneasy.

He did not become more settled when he had gone to a drawer in his writing-desk and had taken out a cabinet portrait—the portrait of a lady—and had gazed at it for several minutes. He laid it back with something like a sigh, and then brought out of the same receptacle a quantity of manuscript, every page of which consisted of a number of lines, irregular as to their length, but each one beginning with a capital letter. This is the least compromising way of referring to such manuscripts. To say that they were poetry would, perhaps, be to place a fictitious value upon them; but they certainly had one feature in common with the noblest poems ever written in English: every line began with a capital letter.

Dr Koomadhi's lips—they constituted not the least prominent of his features—moved as he read to himself the lines which he had written during the past three months,—since

his return to Picotee with authority to spend some thousands of pounds in carrying out certain experiments, the result of which would, it was generally hoped, transform the region of the Gambia into one of the healthiest of her Majesty's possessions. Then he sighed again and laid the manuscripts over the photograph, closing and locking the drawer of the desk.

He walked fitfully up and down the room for another hour. Then he opened his shutters, and the first breath of the evening breeze from the sea came upon his face.

“ I'll do it,” he said resolutely. “ Why should I not do it? Surely that old ridiculous prejudice is worn out. Surely she, at least, will be superior to such prejudice. Yes, she must—she must. I have succeeded hitherto in everything that I have attempted, and shall I fail in this? ”

The roar of the rollers along the beach filled the room, at the open window of which Dr Koomadhi remained standing for several minutes.

II.

Dr Koomadhi belonged to a race who are intolerant of any middle course so far as dress is concerned. They are either very much dressed or very much undressed. But he had lived long enough in England to have chastened whatever yearning he may have had for running into either extreme. Only now and again—usually when in football costume—he had felt a strange longing to forswear the more cumbersome tweeds of daily life. This longing, combined with the circumstance of his being extremely fond of football, might be accepted as evidence that the traditions of the savages from whom he had sprung survived in his nature, just as they do in the youth of Great Britain, only he had not to go so far back as have the most of the youth of Great Britain, to reach the fountain-head.

The evening attire which he now resumed was wholly white,—from his pith helmet down to his canvas shoes, he was in white, with the exception of his tie, which was black. He

looked at himself in a glass when at the point of leaving his house, and he felt satisfied with his appearance; only he should have dearly liked to exchange his black tie for one of scarlet. He could not understand how it was that he had never passed a draper's window in London without staring with envious eyes at the crimson scarves displayed for sale. No one could know what heroic sacrifices he made in rejecting all such allurements. No one could know what he suffered while crushing down that uncivilised longing for a brilliant colour.

Just before leaving the house he went to his desk and brought out of one of the drawers a small ivory box. He unlocked it and stood for some time with his face down to the thing that the box contained—a curiously-speckled stone, somewhat resembling a human ear. While keeping his head down to this thing his lips were moving. He was clearly murmuring some phrases in a strange language into that curiously shaped stone.

Relocking the ivory box, he returned it to the drawer, which he also locked. Then he left his house, and took a path leading to a well-

built villa standing in front of a banana-jungle, with a tall flag-pole before its hall door — a flag-pole from which the union-jack fluttered, indicating to all casual visitors that this was the official residence of her Majesty's Commissioner to the Gambia, Commander Hope, R.N.

“Hallo, Koomadhi!” came a voice from the open window to the right of the door. “Pardon me for five minutes. I'm engaged at my correspondence to go to England by the *Penguin* this evening. But don't mind me. Go through to the drawing-room and my daughter will give you a cup of tea.”

“All right, sir,” said Dr Koomadhi. “Don't hurry on my account. I was merely calling to mention that I had forwarded my report early in the day; but I'll wait inside.”

“All right,” came the voice from the window. “I'm at the last folios.”

Dr Koomadhi was in the act of entering the porch when his pith helmet was snatched off by some unseen hand, and a curious shriek sounded on the balcony above the porch.

“The ruffian!” said Koomadhi, with a laugh. “The ruffian! He's at his tricks again.”

He took a few steps back and looked up to the balcony. There sat an immense tame baboon, wearing the helmet and screeching with merriment.

“I’ll have to give you another lesson, my gentleman,” said the doctor, shaking his finger at the creature. “Hand me down that helmet at once.”

The baboon made a grimace and then raised his right hand to the salute—his favourite trick.

Suddenly the doctor produced a sound with his lips, and in an instant the monkey had dropped the helmet and had fled in alarm from the balcony to the roof of the house, whence he gazed in every direction, while the doctor went into the house with his helmet in his hand. He had merely given the simian word of alarm, which the creature, understanding its mother tongue, had promptly acted upon.

“‘You may break, you may shatter the vase if you will, but the scent’—you know the rest, sir,” remarked Mr Letts, the Commissioner’s Secretary, who had observed from his window the whole transaction.

“What was that, Letts?” asked the Commissioner.

“Koomadhi spoke to the baboon in its own tongue, sir, and it took the hint of a man and a brother and cleared off.”

“Yes, but where does the shattering of the vase come in?” asked the Commissioner.

“I mean to suggest that a nigger remains a nigger, and remains on speaking terms with a baboon, even though he has a college degree and wears tweeds,” said Mr Letts.

“Oh,” said the Commissioner.

He had heard the same opinion expressed by various members of his staff ever since he had anything to do with the administration of affairs on the West Coast. He had long ago ceased to take even the smallest amount of interest in the question of the exact depth of a negro's veneer of civilisation.

III.

But while Mr Letts was quoting Thomas Moore's line—in a corrupt form—to the Commissioner, Dr Koomadhi was accepting, with a

certain amount of dignity, the greeting which was extended to him by Miss Hope, the Commissioner's daughter, in the drawing-room. She had been trying over some songs which had just arrived from England. Two of them were of a high colour of sentimentalism, another belonged to that form of poetic composition known as a coon song. It had a banjo obbligato; but the pianoforte accompaniment of itself gave more than a suggestion of the twanging of strings and the banging of a tambourine. Had Dr Koomadhi arrived a few minutes sooner it would have been his privilege to hear Gertrude Hope chant the chorus—

“Don't you belieb un, Massa John,
Jes' winkie mid yo' eye,
Kick up yo' heels to de gasalier—
Say, how am dat for high?”

But Gertrude had, after singing the melody, pushed the copy under a pile of music, and had risen from the piano to receive her visitor, at the same time ringing for tea.

He apologised for interrupting her at the piano.

“If I had only known that you were singing, I should certainly have—well, not exactly, stayed away; no, I should have come sooner, and remained a worshipper in the outer court.”

“Oh, I wasn’t singing—not regularly singing,” said she, with a laugh. “Trying over stupid songs about lovers’ partings is not singing, Dr Koomadhi.”

“Lovers’ partings?” said he. “They seem particularly well adapted to lyrical treatment.”

“The songs at any rate are heart-breaking,” said she.

“They represent the most acute stage of the lovers’ feelings, then?” said he.

“I daresay. I suppose there are degrees of feelings even of lovers.”

“I’m sure of it, Miss Hope.”

He was seated in a wicker chair; she had thrown herself into another—a seat that gave her the appearance of lying in a hammock. He scanned her from her white forehead down to the dainty feet that crossed one another on the sloping support of cane-work. She would have been looked on as a very pretty girl in a London drawing-room; and even a girl who

would be regarded as commonplace there would pass as a marvel of loveliness on the West Coast of Africa.

“Yes,” continued Dr Koomadhi, “I’m sure there are degrees of feeling even among lovers.”

“You are a doctor, and so doubtless have had many opportunities of diagnosing the disease in all its stages,” said she.

“Yes, I am a doctor,” said he. “I am also a man. I have felt. I feel.”

She gave another laugh.

“A complete conjugation of the verb,” said she. “Past and present tenses. How about the future?”

There was only a little pause before he said—

“The future is in your hands, Miss Hope. I have come here to-day to tell you that I have never loved any one in all my life but you, and to ask you if you will marry me.”

There was now a long pause—so long that he became hopeful of her answer. Then he saw the blank look that was upon her face change—he saw the flush that came over her white face

when she had had time to realise the import of his words.

She started up, and at the same instant the baboon came in front of the window and raised his right hand to the salute.

“You are mad—mad!” she said, in a whisper that had something fierce about it. Then she lay back in her chair with a laugh. “*I* marry you—*you*. I should as soon marry——”

She had pointed to the baboon before she had checked herself.

“You would as soon marry the baboon as me?” said he in a low and laboured voice.

“I did not say that, although—Dr Koomadhi, what you have told me has given me a shock—such a shock as I have never had before. I am not myself—if I said anything hurtful to you I know that you will attribute it to the shock—I ask your pardon—sincerely—humbly. I never thought it possible that you—you—oh, you must have been mad! You——”

“Give me a cup of tea, my dearest, if you don’t want to see me perish before your eyes.”

The words came from outside a window behind Dr Koomadhi, and in another second a

man had entered from the verandah, and had given a low whistle on perceiving that Miss Hope had a visitor.

“Come along,” said Miss Hope, when she had drawn a deep breath—“Come along and be introduced to Dr Koomadhi. You have often heard of Dr Koomadhi, I’m sure, Dick. Dr Koomadhi, this is Major Minton.”

“How do you do?” said the stranger, giving his hand to the doctor. “I’m glad to meet you. I’ve heard a lot about you, and how clever you are.”

“You flatter me,” said Dr Koomadhi, shaking hands with the new-comer. “I must now rush away, Miss Hope,” he added. “I only called to tell your father that I had forwarded some reports by the *Penguin*.”

“Jolly old tub, the *Penguin*—glad I’ve seen the last of her,” said Major Minton.

“Major Minton arrived by the *Penguin* this morning,” said Gertrude. “Must you really go away, Dr Koomadhi?”

“Not even the prospect of a cup of your tea would make me swerve from the path of duty, Miss Hope,” said the doctor, with a smile so

chastened as to be deprived of all its Ethiopian character.

He shook hands gracefully with her and Major Minton, and passed out by the verandah, the baboon standing to one side and solemnly saluting. The Major was the only one who laughed, and his laugh was a roar.

IV.

Dr Koomadhi found waiting for him at his house his old friend Mr Ross, the surgeon of the *Penguin*. He had been unable to leave the steamer earlier in the day, and he had only an hour to spend ashore. No, he did not think that anything was the matter with a bottle of champagne, provided that it was large enough and dry enough, and that it had been plunged into ice, not ice plunged into it.

These essentials being guaranteed by Dr Koomadhi, Mr Ross's hour passed — as he thought — pleasantly enough. The two men sat together on cane chairs on the balcony facing the sea. It is at such a time, and under such conditions, that existence on the

Gambia becomes not merely endurable, but absolutely delightful. Mr Ross made a remark to this effect, and expressed the opinion that his friend was in luck.

“In luck? Oh yes. I’m the luckiest fellow in the world,” responded Koomadhi grimly. “I’ve everything that heart can wish for.”

“Yes, you’re well paid, you don’t mind the climate, and you’re honoured and respected by the whole community,” said Ross.

“Of course—honoured and respected—that’s the strong point of the situation,” said Koomadhi.

“The only drawback seems to me to be the rather narrow limits of the society. Still, the Commissioner is a decent enough sort of old boy, and Letts has a good deal to recommend him. By the way, you’ll not be so badly off in this matter during the next six months as you have been. We brought out a chap named Minton—a chap that any one could get on with. He’s just chucked the service and is going to marry Miss Hope.”

“I have just met him at the Residency,” said Koomadhi, filling up with a steady hand the

glass of his guest. "And so he's going to marry Miss Hope, is he?"

"Yes; he confided a lot in me—mostly on the bridge toward the hour of midnight. The young woman has been engaged to him for a year past. They met just before the Commissioner got his berth, but the daughter being a good daughter, and with a larger sense of duty than is possessed by most girls, swore—in her own way, of course—that nothing should tempt her to desert her father for at least a year. Much to Minton's disgust, as you can understand, she came out here, telling him that if he still was anxious to marry her, he might follow her at the end of a year. Well, as he retained his fancy, he came out with us, and I believe you'll be in a position to add an official wedding to your other experiences, Koomadhi."

"That's something to look forward to," said Koomadhi. "But how will that incident improve society in this neighbourhood? I suppose Minton and his wife will get off to England as soon as possible?"

"Not they. Although they are to get married at once, they are to remain here for six or seven

months—until, in fact, the Commissioner gets his leave, and then they all mean to go home together. Minton has a trifle of six thousand a-year and a free house in Yorkshire, so Miss Hope is in luck—so, for that matter, is Minton; she's a fine young woman, I believe. I only met her once."

"I'm not so certain about her constitution," said Koomadhi. "Her lungs are, I believe, all right, but her circulation is defective, and she suffers from headaches just when she should be at her best."

"Oh, hang it all! a girl's a girl for a' that!" cried Ross. "Your circulation's defective, Koomadhi, if you're capable only of judging a girl by the stethoscope. You're too much absorbed in your profession, that's what's the matter with you."

"I daresay you are right," Koomadhi admitted after a pause of a few seconds.

In the course of the next half-hour, several other topics in addition to the matrimonial prospects of Major Minton and the constitutional shortcomings of Miss Hope were discussed on the verandah, until, at length, the sound of the

steam-whistle of the *Penguin* was borne shorewards by the breeze.

“That’s a message to me,” said Ross, starting up. “Come down to the shore and see the last of me for three months at any rate.”

Dr Koomadhi put on his helmet, and saw his friend safely through the surf on his way to where the steamer was swinging at her anchor. The sun had set before he returned to his house to dinner; and before he had risen from the table a message came to him that one of the officers of the *Houssas* was anxious to see him, being threatened with an attack of fever. The great stars were burning overhead before he returned from the barrack of the *Houssas*, and was able to throw off his coat and lie back in his chair in his own sitting-room.

He had a good deal to think about before going to his bedroom, and he seemed to find the darkness congenial with his thoughts. In fact, the negro acknowledged a sort of brotherhood in the night, and he remained for some hours in that fraternal darkness. It was just midnight when he went, with only a small amount of groping, to his desk, and took out of its

drawer the ivory box containing the ear-shaped stone, into whose orifice he had spoken some words before leaving for the Commissioner's house in the afternoon. He unlocked the box and removed the stone. He left his villa, taking the stone with him, and strolled once more to the house which he had visited a few hours before.

Lights were in the windows of the Residency, and certain musical sounds were coming from the room where he had been. With the twanging of the banjo there came the sound of a light bass voice of no particular timbre, chanting the words of the latest plantation melody—

“ Don't you belieb un, Massa John,
Jes' winkie mid yo' eye,
Kick up yo' heels to de gasalier—
Say, how am dat for high ? ”

Dr Koomadhi listened while three stanzas of the doggerel were being sung by Major Minton ; then he raised the ear-shaped stone that was in the hollow of his hand, and whispered some words into it as he had done in the afternoon. In a second the song stopped,

although the singer was in the middle of a stanza.

“Confound it all!” cried Major Minton—Koomadhi heard his voice distinctly. “One of my strings is broken. I suppose it was the sudden change of atmosphere that made it give way. It’s a good bit drier here than aboard the *Penguin*.”

“The concert is over for to-night,” came the voice of the Commissioner. “It’s about time for all of us to be in our beds.”

“That’s my notion too,” said Letts. “Those who object can have their money returned at the doors.”

“It was strange—that breaking of the string without warning,” Dr Koomadhi heard Gertrude say.

He smiled.

It was only at midnight in the open air, and when he was alone, that he allowed himself the luxury of an unbridled smile. He knew the weaknesses of his race.

He put the stone into the pocket of his coat and returned to his house.

V.

The marriage of Major Minton to Miss Hope took place in another week. Of course the ceremony was performed by the Lord Bishop of Bonny, who was also Metropolitan of the Gambia and Senegal. The gunboat that was at the anchorage displayed every available rag of bunting, and the lieutenant who commanded her said he would gladly have fired a salute in honour of the event, only for the fact that the Admiralty made him accountable for every ounce of powder that he burned, and, in addition, for the wear and tear on every gun. The guns didn't bear much tampering with, and there was nothing so bad for them as firing them: it wore them out, the Admiralty stated, and the practice must be put a stop to.

But if there was no official burning of powder to mark the happy event, there was a great deal of it that was unofficial and wholly irregular. Dr Koomadhi spent several hours of the afternoon amputating fingers of Krooboys that had been mutilated through an imperfect acquaint-

ance, on the part of the native populace, with the properties of gunpowder when ignited. An eye or two were reported to be missing, and in the cool of the evening the Doctor had brought to him, by a conscientious townsman, a human ear for which no owner could be found.

The happy pair went to the Canary Islands for their honeymoon, and returned radiant at the end of six weeks ; and the Commissioner's *ménage*, which had suffered materially through the absence of the Commissioner's daughter, was restored in all its former perfection. Every night varied strains of melody floated to the ears of such persons as were in the neighbourhood of the Residency ; and it was a fact that Major Minton's banjo never twanged without attracting an audience of from ten to five hundred of the negro population of Picotee. The pathway was every night paved with negroes, who listened, shoulder to shoulder, and kneecap to kneecap—they sat upon their haunches—to the fascinating songs. They felt that if the Commissioner had only introduced a tom-tom obbligato to the tom-tom melodies, the artistic charm of the performance would be complete.

The native evangelist, who occasionally contrived to fill a schoolhouse with young Christians by the aid of a harmonium,—a wheezy asthmatic instrument, which, in spite of a long lifetime spent on the West Coast, had never become fully acclimatised,—felt that his success was seriously jeopardised by the Major's secular melodies. When the flock were privileged to hear such fascinating music unconditionally, he knew that it was unreasonable to expect them to be regular in their attendance at the schoolhouse, where the harmonium wheezed only after certain religious services had been forced on them.

He wondered if the Bishop might be approached on the subject of introducing the banjo into the schoolhouse services. He believed that with such auxiliaries as the banjo, and perhaps—but this was optional—the bones, a large evangelistic work might be done in the outlying districts of Picotee.

Dr Koomadhi had always been a frequent visitor at the Residence, but for some time after the marriage of the Commissioner's daughter he was not quite so often to be found

in the drawing-room of an evening. Gradually, however, he increased the number of his weekly visits. He was the only person in the neighbourhood who could (occasionally) beat Major Minton at billiards, and this fact helped, in a large measure, to overcome the prejudice which Major Minton frankly admitted (to his wife) he entertained against the native races of West Africa. Major Minton was becoming a first-class billiard-player, as any active person who understands the game is likely to become after a few months' residence at a West Coast settlement.

"Dr Koomadhi is a gentleman and a Christian," Mrs Minton remarked one day when Mr Letts, the Secretary, had challenged discussion upon his favourite topic—namely, the thinness of the veneer of civilisation upon the most civilised savage.

"He's a negro-gentleman, I admit," said Letts.

"A man who plays so straight a game of billiards can't be far wrong," remarked Major Minton.

"I have reasons—the best of reasons—for

knowing that Dr Koomadhi is a forgiving Christian gentleman," said Gertrude. "Yes, he shall always be my friend."

She had not forgiven herself for that terrible half-spoken sentence, "I would as soon marry——"

She had not forgiven herself for having glanced at the baboon as she checked the words that sprang from her almost involuntarily.

But Dr Koomadhi was showing day by day that he had forgiven them.

And thus it was she felt that he was worthy to be regarded by all men as a gentleman and a Christian.

VI.

A few days later Dr Koomadhi was visited by Major Minton. The Major was anxious to have some shooting at big game, and he was greatly disappointed at being unable to find in the neighbourhood of Picotee any one who could put him on the right track to gratify his longing for slaughter. The ivory-hunters did not find an outlet for their business at Picotee,

and the majority of the inhabitants were as unenterprising, Major Minton said, as the chawbacons of an English village; nay, more so, for the chawbacons were beginning to know the joy of a metropolitan music hall, and that meant enterprise. He wondered if Koomadhi would allow him to accompany him on his next excursion inland.

Koomadhi said that no proposal could give him greater pleasure. He would be going up again in a week or two, and he could promise Major Minton some first-class sport. He could show him some queer things.

Talking of queer things, had Major Minton ever seen a piece of the famous African soundstone?

It was supposed that the famous statue of Memnon had been carved out of that stone.

Major Minton had considered all that had been written on the subject of the talking statue utter rot, and he believed so still. Could any sane man credit a story like that, he was anxious to know?

“I suppose not,” said Koomadhi.

“But anyhow, I have now and again come

upon pieces of the sound-stone. I'll show you a couple of bits."

He produced the roughly cut stone ear, and then an equally rough stone chipped into the form of a mouth—a negro's mouth.

"They are rum things, to be sure," said Minton. "I don't think that I ever saw stones just the same. Is the material marble?"

"I haven't the least idea," said Koomadhi. "But just put that stone to your ear for a few moments."

Minton had the mouth-stone in his hand. Koomadhi retained the ear-stone and put it to his lips the moment that the Major raised his hand.

"No," said the Major. "I hear nothing. That sound-stone myth isn't good enough for me. I'm not exactly a lunatic yet, and that's why I'm going to climb up to your roof to enjoy the sea-breeze. Take your marvellous sound-stone, and I'll show you what it is to be a gymnast."

He opened the shutters, got out upon the verandah, and began climbing one of the supports of the verandah roof. He was a pretty

fair athlete, but when the thermometer registers 97° is not, perhaps, the most favourable time for violent exercise. Still, he reached the roof with his hands and threw one leg up; in another moment he was sitting on the highest part of the roof, and was inviting Koomadhi to join him, declaring that only a fool would remain indoors on such a day.

Koomadhi smiled and shook his head.

“You must have some refreshment after your exertions,” said he. “What would you like—a brandy-and-soda, with a lump of ice clinking the sides of the tumbler?”

“That sounds inviting,” said Major Minton, scratching his chest with a forefinger—it had apparently been chafed in his ascent of the roof. “Yes; but if you chance to have a banana and a few nuts—by Jingo I should like a nut or two. Has no dietist written a paper on the dietetic value of the common or garden nut, Koomadhi?”

“Come down and I’ll give you as many nuts as you can eat,” said Koomadhi.

“Yes, I’ll come down this way,” said the Major. He swung himself by one arm from

the side of the roof to the bough of a tree. There he hung suspended by the other arm, and swinging slowly backward and forward. Even then he scraped the breast of his shirt, uttering a number of sounds that might have meant laughter. Then he caught a lower branch with his loose arm and dropped to the ground. Again he scraped at his chest and laughed.

“How about those nuts?” he said. “I think I’ve earned them. How the mischief is it that I neglected my gymnastics all these months? What a fool I was! Walking along in the open day by day, when I might have been enjoying the free life of the jungle!”

“Come inside and try a bit of cocoanut,” said Koomadhi.

“I’m your man,” said the Major.

“My man — man?” laughed the Doctor. “Oh yes, you’ve earned the cocoanut.”

The soft flesh of a green cocoanut lay on the table of the sitting-room, and Major Minton caught it up and swallowed it without ceremony. The Doctor watched him with a curious expression on his face.

“That’s the most refreshing tiffin I’ve had for a long time,” said the Major. “Now, I’ll have to get back to the Residency. Will you drop in for a game of billiards?”

“Perhaps I may,” said the Doctor. “Take that sound-stone again, and try if you really cannot hear anything when you put it to your ear.”

“My dear fellow, I’m not the sort of a chap to become the victim of a delusion,” said the Major, picking up the stone and holding it to his ear. “Not a sound do I hear. Hang it all, man, I’d get more sound out of a common shell. *Au revoir.*”

He had his eyes fixed upon the ink-bottle that stood on the desk beside a blotter and a sheet of writing-paper. Dr Koomadhi noticed the expression in his eyes, and turned to open the door. The very instant that his back was turned, Major Minton ran to the ink-bottle, upset it upon the blotter, and then rushed off by the open window, laughing heartily.

And yet there was no human being who so detested the playing of practical jokes as Major Minton.

Dr Koomadhi put away the stones, and called his servant to wipe up the ink, which was dripping down to the floor.

“Lorramussy!” cried the old woman. “How eber did yo’ make dat muss?”

“I didn’t know that it was on the blotter until too late,” said he. And yet Dr Koomadhi was a most truthful man—for a doctor.

VII.

“Hullo!” said Letts, “what have you been doing to yourself?”

Major Minton had thrown himself into the Secretary’s cosiest chair on his return from visiting Dr Koomadhi, and was wiping his forehead.

“I’ve been doing more to myself than I should have done,” replied Minton. “For heaven’s sake, ring for a brandy-and-soda!”

“A brandy-and-soda? That’s an extreme measure,” said Letts. “But you look as if you needed one.” He went to his own cupboard and produced the brandy, and then rang the bell for the soda-water, which was of course

kept in the refrigerator. Then he looked curiously at the man in the chair. "By the Lord Harry! you've been in a fight," he cried, when his examination had concluded. "You're an ass to come between any belligerents in this neighbourhood: you forget that Picotee Street is not Regent Street. You got your collar torn off your coat for your pains; and, O Lord, your trousers!"

"I did not notice how much out of line I had fallen until now," said Minton, with a laugh. "By George, Letts, that tear in my knee does suggest a free-and-easy tussle."

"But how on earth did it come about?" asked Letts. "Surely you should know better than to go for a nigger as you would for a Christian! Why the mischief didn't you kick him on the shins, and then put your knee into his face?"

"Give me the tumbler."

The Secretary handed him the tumbler, containing a stiff "peg," and he drained it without giving any evidence of dissatisfaction.

"Now, how did it come about?" inquired Letts. "I hope you haven't dragged us into

the business. If you have, there'll be a question asked about it in the House of Commons by one of those busybodies who have no other way of proving to their constituents that they're in attendance. 'Mr Jones asked the Secretary of State for the Colonies if he had any information to give to the House regarding an alleged outrage by a white man, closely associated with the family of her Majesty's Commissioner at Picotee, upon a native or natives of that colony.' That's how it will read. Then there'll be puppy leaders in those papers that deal with 'justices' justice': the boy who gets a month's imprisonment for stealing a turnip — you know that sort of thing."

"Keep your hair on," said Minton; "there'll be no show in the House about this. There has been no row. I went round to Koomadhi's, and when we were talking together I suddenly fancied that the day was just one for a gymnastic display. I don't know whether it was that polite manner of Koomadhi's or something else set me off, but I felt an irresistible impulse to bounce. Without waiting to take off my

coat I went out on the verandah and hauled myself up to the roof: I don't know how I did it. I might have managed it ten years ago, when I was in condition; but, considering how far off colour I am just now, by George! I don't know how I managed it. Anyhow, I did manage it."

"At some trifling cost," said Letts. "And what did you do on the roof when you got there?"

"Well, I swung myself down again. But I seemed to have a notion in the meantime that that nice, well-groomed nigger would try to climb up beside me, and I know that I had an impulse to catch him by the tail—the tail of his coat, of course—and swing him through the shutters."

"But he didn't make such an ass of himself as to go through some gymnastics, and the thermometer standing a degree or two under a hundred. Well, you've got off well this time, Minton; but don't do it again, that's all."

"I tell you it was an impulse — a curious——"

“Oh, impulses like that don’t come to chaps who have their wits about them.”

“I suppose it was a bit of bounding, after all. But, somehow—well, you wouldn’t just call me a bounder, would you, Letts?”

“Why shouldn’t I call you a bounder, I’d like to know? A bounder is one who bounds, isn’t he?”

“Well, I suppose—but I give you my word, I felt at that moment that it was the most natural thing I could have done—climbing up to the roof of the verandah, and then——”

“And then?”

“Swinging down again, I suppose.”

He was afraid to tell Letts of that practical joke which he had played off on Koomadhi, when he found that the Doctor did not lend himself to that subtle piece of jocularitv which Minton said he had conceived when sitting on the roof of the verandah. Letts had been pretty hard on him for having gone so far as to climb up to the roof; but what would he have said if he had been told about that ink-bottle incident?

Minton thought it would, on the whole, be

doing himself more ample justice if he were to withhold from Letts all information regarding that ink-bottle business. He said nothing about it, and when Letts mumbled something when in the act of lighting a cigar—something about fellows, who behave like idiots, going home and giving the whole West Coast a bad name, whereas, properly treated, the climate was one of the most salubrious, he remarked confidentially—

“I say, old chap, you needn’t mind jawing to the missus or the Governor about this business; it’s not worth talking about, you know; but they’re both given to exaggerate the importance of such things—Gertrude especially. I’m a bit afraid of her still, I admit: we’ve only been married about three months, you’ll remember.”

“Great Duke! here’s a chap who fancies that as time goes on he’ll get less afraid of his wife,” cried Letts. “Well, well, some chaps do get hallucinations early in life.”

“Don’t say a word about it, Letts. Where’s the good of making a poor girl uneasy?”

“Where, indeed? But why ‘poor girl’?”

“Because she’s liable to be made uneasy at trifles. You’re not—only riled. But I don’t blame you : you’ve been on this infernal coast for three years.”

“There’s nothing the matter with the coast : it’s only the idiots——”

“Quite so : I seem somehow to feel that I’ve heard all that sort of thing before. I’m one of the idiots.”

“Far be it from me to contradict so able a diagnosis of——”

He caught the cushion which Minton hurled at him, and laughed. Then he became curiously thoughtful.

“By the way,” he said, “wasn’t it a bit rum that Koomadhi didn’t try to prevent your swinging out to that roof? He’s a medico, and so should know how such unnatural exertion is apt to play the mischief with a chap in such a temperature as this. Didn’t he abuse you in his polite way?”

“Not he,” said Minton ; “on the contrary, I believe I had an idea that I heard him suggest . . . no, no ; that’s a mistake, of course.”

“What’s a mistake?”

“That idea of mine—I don’t know how I came to have it.”

“You were under the impression, somehow, that he suggested your climbing to the roof? That was a rummy notion, wasn’t it?”

“A bit too rummy for general use. Oh no: he only said—now, what the mischief did he say? Oh, no matter.”

“If he said ‘no matter’ when he saw that you were bent on gymnastics in the middle of a day with the temperature hovering about a hundred, he should be ashamed of himself.”

“He didn’t say ‘no matter.’ I’ve just said it. Let me say it again. You should be a cross-examiner at the Bailey and Middlesex Session, Letts. Now, mind, not a word to the missus. Don’t let her cross-examine you: evade her as I’m evading you. I’ll see you after dinner: maybe we’ll have a billiard together—I’m too tired now.”

He went off, leaving Letts trying to find out the place where he had left off in a novel of George Eliot’s. George Eliot is still read on the West Coast of Africa.

But when Minton had left the room Letts did not trouble himself further with the novel. He tossed it away and lay back in his Madeira chair with a frown, suggesting perplexity, on his face.

Some five minutes had passed, and yet the frown, so far from departing, had but increased in intensity.

“I should like very much to know what his game is,” he muttered. “It wouldn’t at all be a bad idea to induce sunstroke by over-exertion on a day like this. But why can’t he remember if the nigger tried on that game with him? P’chut! what’s the good of bothering about it when the game didn’t come off, whatever it was?”

But in spite of his attempted dismissal of the whole matter from his mind, he utterly failed to give to the confession of the youth in ‘Middlemarch’ (it was to the effect that his father had been a pawnbroker, and it was very properly made to the young woman to the accompaniment of the peals of a terrific thunderstorm) the attention which so striking an incident demanded.

VIII.

“If it’s a command, sir, I’ll obey; if not, well——”

“Oh, nonsense, Letts!” said the Commissioner. “There’s no command to a dinner with my daughter, her husband, and another man.”

“Ah, that other man,” said Letts.

“Now, I hope I’ll hear nothing more about your absurd objection to that other man,” said the Commissioner. “I tell you that it’s not only ridiculous, that old-fashioned prejudice of yours, it’s prejudicial to the Service—it is, upon my soul, Letts. You know as well as I do that the great thing is to get in touch with the natives, to show them that, as common subjects of the Sovereign, enjoying equal rights wherever that flag waves, we are, we are—well, we must show them that we’ve no prejudices. You’ll admit that we must do that, Letts.”

(As Letts had not written out this particular speech for him, the Commissioner was a trifle

shaky, and found it to his advantage to abandon the oratorical in favour of the colloquial style.)

“I don’t feel called on to show that I’m not prejudiced against the whole race, sir — the whole race as a race, and Dr Koomadhi as an individual,” said Letts. “Therefore I hope that you and Mrs Minton will excuse me from your dinner.”

“Upon my soul, I’m surprised at you, Letts,” said Commander Hope. “I didn’t expect to find in these days of enlightenment such old-fashioned prejudices as regards race. Great heavens! sir, is the accident of a man’s being a negro to be looked on as debarring him from — from — well, from all that you would make out — the friendship of the superior race, the——”

“Ah, there you are, sir; the superior race. In matters of equality there’s no superior.”

“Oh, of course I don’t mean to suggest that there isn’t some difference between the two races. Don’t they say it was the effects of the curse, Letts — the curse of Ham? If a race was subject to the disabilities of an early curse duly recorded, you can’t quite expect

them to recover themselves all in a moment: it wouldn't be reasonable—it wouldn't be Scriptural either. But I think that common charity should make us—well, should make us do our best to mitigate their unfortunate position. That appeal of yours to Scripture, Letts, was used as an argument in favour of slavery. It's unworthy of you."

"I agree with you, sir; and I do so the more readily as I don't recollect ever having made use of such an authority as Scripture to bear out my contention that the polish of a nigger is no deeper than the polish on a mahogany table,—a thin and transparent film of lacquer. You see I've had the advantage of living in Ashantee for six months, and when there I got pretty well grounded on the negro as a man and a brother. A man—well, perhaps; a brother, yes, own brother to the devil himself."

"Nonsense, Letts! Can't you keep Scripture out of the argument?"

"I tell you, sir, I saw things in the Ashantee country that made me feel certain that the arch-fiend made that region his headquarters many

years ago, and that he has devoted himself ever since to the training of the inhabitants. They are his chosen people. If you had seen the unspeakable things that I saw during my six months in Ashantee, you would hold to my belief that the people have been taught by Satan himself, and that they have gone one better than their instructor. No, sir, I'll not dine with Koomadhi."

Commander Hope shook his head.

"You're very pig-headed, Letts," he remarked; "but we won't quarrel. I'll see if I can make Gertrude understand how it is you refuse her invitation."

"I hope to heaven that she'll never get a glimpse of the real negro, sir—the negro with his lacquer scratched off."

The Commissioner laughed.

"I'll not tell her that, Letts," he said.

Letts did not laugh.

It was really Gertrude who had suggested inviting Dr Koomadhi to dinner at the Residency. He had frequently partaken of the refreshment of tea in her drawing-room, but she knew that tea counts for nothing in the

social scale even at Picotee: it conferred no more distinction upon one than a presentation at the White House does upon a citizen of the United States, or a citizen's wife or sister. He had never been asked to dine at the Commissioner's table, and that she knew to be a distinction, and one which he would be certain to value.

But when she suggested to her father that there would be a certain gracefulness in the act of inviting Dr Koomadhi to dinner, she found her suggestion treated with that form of contumely known as the snub. Her father had looked at her sternly and walked away, saying—

“Impossible! What! a nig—— Oh, my dear, you don't understand these things. Impossible—impossible!”

Gertrude Minton, being a woman, may not have understood some things, but she thoroughly understood how her father (and all other men) should be treated upon occasions. She took her snubbing meekly, as every clever woman takes a snubbing, when administered by a father, or a husband, or a brother; and

of course, later on, she carried her point—as any clever woman will; for a properly sustained scheme of meekness, if persisted in, will accomplish anything, by making the man who snubs thoroughly ashamed of himself, and the man who is thoroughly ashamed of himself will be glad to come to terms, no matter how disadvantageous to himself, in order to avert a continuance of that reproachful meekness.

It was the Commissioner himself who, a few days later, went to his daughter and told her that if she had her heart set upon inviting Dr Koomadhi to dinner he would not interfere. It had at first seemed to him a monstrous proposal, he admitted; but on thinking over it calmly, and with the recollection of the circumstances (1) that the present day was one of innovations; (2) that the negroes were treated on terms of the most perfect equality by the people of the United States of America,—he had come to the conclusion that it was necessary even for a British naval officer to march with the times; consequently he was prepared to do anything that his daughter

suggested. He added, however, that up to the date at which he was speaking he had got on very well without once asking a nig—that is, a negro gentleman, to dine at his table.

“I knew you would consent, papa,” said Gertrude, throwing off her mask of meekness in a moment, much to the satisfaction of her father. “I knew you would consent: it would be quite unlike you not to consent. You are so broad-minded—so generous—so reasonable in your views on all native questions. I feel that I—that we—owe some amends—that is, we should do our best to give him to understand that we do not regard a mere accident of colour as disqualifying him from—from——”

“Quite so,” said her father. “We’ll ask Letts: he won’t come, though.”

“Why should he not come?” she asked.

“Letts is full of prejudice, my dear. He has more than once made disparaging remarks regarding Koomadhi. You see, he lived for some months in the Ashantee country, and saw the human sacrifices and other barbarities.”

“If you speak to him with due authority, he will be compelled to come,” said Gertrude warmly. “You are the head here, are you not?”

He looked at her and assented, though he knew perfectly well that it was not he who was the head of the Residency. Would he ask a nigger to dine at his table if he was at the head of it? he asked himself.

“Well, then, just tell Letts that you expect him to dine here on Wednesday next, and he is bound to come. He is only secretary here.”

“My dear Gertrude, you know as well as I do what it is to be secretary here,” said the Commissioner. “Letts can do what he pleases. I shall certainly not coerce him in any way: I know it would be no use trying.”

“But you must try,” cried Gertrude. She had, undoubtedly, quite got rid of her meekness. “You must try; and you must succeed too.”

Well, the Commissioner had tried, and the result of his attempt has just been recorded.

He told his daughter of the firm attitude that Letts had assumed—it was just the atti-

tude which he himself would like to assume if he had the courage; but of course he did not suggest so much to Gertrude.

“The foolish fellow! I shall have to go to him myself,” said she.

And she went to him.

IX.

She had at one time fancied that Letts was fond of her, and she had thought that her liking for him was no mere fancy. A young woman with good looks and a pleasant manner and a young man with a career before him are very apt to have fancies in respect to each other on the West Coast of Africa, where good looks and pleasant manners are not to be met with daily. Of course when Gertrude had gone home for some months, and had met Major Minton, she became aware of the fact that her liking for Letts was the merest fancy; and perhaps when she returned with the story of her having promised (under certain conditions) to marry Major Minton, Letts had also come to the conclusion that his feeling towards

Miss Hope was also a fancy. This is, however, not quite so certain. At any rate, Letts and she had always been very good friends.

For half-an-hour she talked to him quite pleasantly at first, then quite earnestly—didactically and sarcastically—on the subject of his foolish prejudice. She called it foolish when she was pleasant, and she called it contemptible when she ceased to be pleasant, on a matter which she, for her part, thought had been long ago passed out of the region of controversy. Surely a man of Mr Letts' intelligence and observation could not be serious in objecting to dine with Dr Koomadhi simply because he chanced to be a negro.

But Mr Letts assured her that he was quite serious in the matter. He didn't pretend, he said, to be superior in point of intelligence or power of observation to men who made no objection to meet on terms of perfect equality the whole Ethiopian race; but he had had certain experiences, he said, and so long as he retained a recollection of these experiences he would decline to sit at the same table with Dr Koo-

madhi or any of his race. Then it was that Mrs Minton ceased to be altogether pleasant as to the phrases which she employed in order to induce Mr Letts to change his mind.

“You are not the only one with experiences,” she said. “I have had experience not merely of negroes generally, but of Dr Koomadhi in particular, and, as I told you some time ago, I have reason to believe him to be a generous, Christian gentleman. That is why I wish to do all that is in my power to make him understand that I regard his possession of the characteristics of a gentleman and a Christian as more than placing him on a level with us. I feel that I am inferior to Dr Koomadhi in those qualities which our religion teaches us to regard as noblest.”

“And I hope with all my soul that you will never have a different experience of him,” said Letts.

“I know that I shall have no different experience of him,” said she, with confidence in her pose and in her tone.

He made no reply to this. And then she went on to ask him some interesting questions

regarding the general design of the Maker of the Universe, and His intention in respect of the negro; and though Letts answered all to the best of his ability, he was not persuaded to accept Mrs Minton's invitation to dinner.

She was naturally very angry, and even went so far as to assure Mr Letts that his refusal to accept the invitation which she offered him might be prejudicial to his being offered any future invitations to dine at her table—an assurance which he received without emotion.

She told her father of her failure, and though he shook his head with due seriousness, yet he refrained from saying "I told you so." But when her husband heard that Letts would not be persuaded, he treated the incident with a really remarkable degree of levity, declaring that if he himself were independent, he would see Koomadhi and all the nigger race sent to a region of congenial blackness before he would sit down to dinner with the best of them. He thought Letts, however, something of an ass for not swallowing his prejudices in a neighbourhood where there were so few decent billiard-players. For himself, he said he would have no

objection to dine with bandits and cut-throats if they consented to join in a good pool afterwards.

When Dr Koomadhi received his invitation to dine at the Residency—it was in the handwriting of Mrs Minton—he smiled. His smiles worked at low pressure in the daytime; he felt that he could not be too careful in this respect; he might, if taken suddenly, be led on to smile naturally in the presence of a man with a kodak, and where would he be then?

He smiled. He went to the drawer where he kept the curious stones, and looked at them for some time, but without touching them. Then he went to the drawer in which he kept the verses that he had written expressive of the effect of Miss Hope's eyes upon his soul. By a poetic licence he assumed that he had a soul, and he liked to write about it: it gave him an opportunity of making it the last word in a line following one that ended with the word "control." He read some of the pages, and honestly believed that they were covered with poetry of the highest character. He felt convinced that there was not another man in the whole Ashantee

country who could write as good poetry ; and perhaps he was not wrong in his estimate of his own powers, and the powers of his Ashantee brethren.

As he closed the door with a bang his face would have seemed to any one who might have chanced to see it one mass of ivory. This effect, startling though it was, was due merely to an incidental change of expression. He had ceased to smile ; his teeth were tightly closed, and his lips had receded from them as a tidal wave recedes from the strand of a coral island, disclosing an unsuspected reef. His lips hid in their billowy depths the remainder of his face, and only that fearful double ridge of locked teeth would have been visible to any one, had any one been present.

The words that Dr Koomadhi managed to utter without unlocking his teeth were undoubtedly suggestive of very strong feeling ; but no literary interest attaches to their repetition.

He seated himself at his desk—after an interval—and wrote a letter which was rather over than under the demands made by politeness upon a man who has been asked to dinner in a rather formal way. He said it would give him

the greatest pleasure to accept the most kind invitation with which he had been honoured by the Commissioner and Mrs Minton; and then he added a word or two, which an ordinary gentleman would possibly have thought superfluous, regarding the pride which he felt at being the recipient of such a distinction.

It could not be said, however, that there was anything in his mode of conducting himself at the dinner-table that suggested any want of familiarity on his part with the habits of good society. He did not eat with his knife, though he might have done so without imperilling in any degree the safety of his mouth, nor did he make any mistake regarding his ice-pudding or his jelly. He also drank his champagne out of the right glass, and he did not take it for granted that the water in his finger-bowl was for any but external use.

As he lay back in his chair, with his serviette across his knees and a cigarette between his fingers, discussing with the Commissioner, with that mild forbearance which one assumes towards one's host, the political situation of the hour, when Mrs Minton had left the room,

he looked the picture of a model English gentleman—a silhouette picture. He hoped that the Conservatives would not go to the country without a programme. What were the leaders thinking of that they hadn't familiarised the country with the policy they meant to pursue should they be returned to power? Home Rule for Ireland! Was there ever so ridiculous a demand seriously made to the country? Why, the Irish were, he assured his host, very little better than savages: he should know—he had been in Ireland for close upon a fortnight. He had some amusing Irish stories. He imitated the brogue of the peasantry. He didn't say it was unmusical; but Home Rule! . . . the idea was too ridiculous to be entertained by any one who knew the people.

His political views were sound beyond a doubt. They were precisely the views of the Commissioner and his son-in-law, and the green chartreuse was velvety as it should be.

For this evening only Major Minton sang to his wife's accompaniment a sentimental song which dwelt upon the misery of meeting daily with smiles a certain person, while his,

the singer's, heart was breaking. He sang it with well-simulated feeling. One would never have thought that there was a banjo in the house.

Then Mrs Minton sang a lovely Scotch song about a burn ; but it turned out that the burn was water and not fire, and the Commissioner dozed in a corner.

At last Major Minton suggested a game of billiards, and the suggestion was acted on without delay.

After playing a game with Dr Koomadhi, while her husband looked on and criticised the strokes from the standpoint of a lenient if discriminating observer, Mrs Minton said "good-night" ; she was tired, she said, and she knew that her husband and Dr Koomadhi meant to play all night, so she thought she might as well go soon as late.

Of course Dr Koomadhi entreated her not to leave them. They would, he assured her, do anything to retain her ; they would even play a four game—abhorred of billiard-players—if she would stay. Her husband did not join in the entreaties of their guest. He played tricky cannons until she had left the room.

X.

“Shall I break?” Minton asked. “I’ll play with spot for a change.”

Before he had completed his second break of twenty-eight the Commissioner had fallen asleep with his cigar between his fingers. When they had commenced he had been critical. But he broke down under the monotony of the second moderate break.

For about a quarter of an hour the game went on, and all the variations from “Hard lines!” to “Dammitall!” were indulged in by the players. Minton had scored eighty against Koomadhi’s seventy-one, and was about to play a hazard requiring great judgment, when his opponent came behind him, saying—

“I don’t see how it can be done : a cannon is the easier game.”

“Well, I’ll try the hazard anyway, and try to leave the red over the pocket.”

“You’ll need to do it very gently,” said his opponent, almost leaning over him as he took his aim at the red ball.

For quite half a minute Minton hung over his cue, and in that space of time Koomadhi had taken out of his pocket the curious stone shaped like a broad ear, and had put it to his own mouth for a second or two while he stood behind the player, returning it quickly to his pocket before the cue had struck the ball.

“What a stroke!” cried Minton. “It would disgrace our friend Jacco.”

“I said the cannon was the easier game,” remarked Koomadhi, chalking his cue. “Hallo! what are you going to do?”

“Who the mischief could play billiards a night like this in such a suit of armour as this?” laughed Minton. He was in the act of pulling his shirt over his head, and he spoke from within its folds. In another second he was stripped to the waist. “Now, my friend,” he chuckled, “we’ll see who’ll win this game. This is the proper rig for any one who means to play billiards as billiards should be played.”

“I wouldn’t have done that if I were you,” said Koomadhi. “Come; you had much better put on your shirt. The Commissioner may object.”

“Let him object,” laughed the half-naked man; “he’s an old fogey anyway. Like most naval men, he has no heart in anything beyond the shape of a button and the exact spot where it should be worn. How was it we had no nuts for dinner, I should like to know?”

Koomadhi had made a cannon. He walked half-way round the table to get the chalk, and in a second Major Minton had picked up the red ball and slipped it into his pocket.

When Koomadhi turned to play the screw back, which he meant to do carefully, only the white balls were on the table, and Minton denied all knowledge of the whereabouts of the red.

Koomadhi laughed, and put his cue into the stand.

“Oh, I say, a joke’s a joke!” chuckled Minton, producing the ball from his pocket. “You won’t play any more? Oh, yes; we’ll have another game, only for a change we’ll play it with our feet. Now, why the mischief people don’t play it with their feet I can’t understand. It stands to reason that the stroke must be far surer. I’ll show you what I mean.

Oh, confound those things!—I'll have them off in a moment."

"You'll do nothing of the kind," said the Doctor firmly, as Major Minton kicked off his shoes and hastened to get rid of the only garments that he was wearing. "For God's sake, don't make such a fool of yourself!"

He had caught his hands, preventing his carrying out his singular design of illustrating the prehensile character of the muscles of the human foot.

"Now, then, put on your shirt and finish your soda-water. I must be off."

Major Minton grinned, and, turning suddenly, caught Dr Koomadhi by the tail of his dress-coat—he had just put it on—and with a quick jerk upset him on the floor.

"God bless my soul!" cried the Commissioner, waking up.

Dr Koomadhi was brushing the dust off his waistcoat; Major Minton was swinging half-way up one of the ropes that controlled the ventilator of the roof.

"What in the name of all that's ridiculous is this?" said the Commissioner. "By the Lord!

I seem to be still dreaming—a nightmare, by George, sir!”

“I really must ask your pardon, sir,” said Koomadhi; “I had no idea that the thing would go on so far as it has. Major Minton and I were having a rather funny trial of strength. He was on one rope, I was on the other. I let go my hold. Come down, man—come down—the game is over.”

“And a most peculiar game it seems to have been,” said the Commissioner. “Great heavens! it can’t be possible that he took off his shirt!”

“It was very foolish, sir,” said Koomadhi. “I think I’ll say good-night.”

The Commissioner paid no attention to him; all his attention was given to his son-in-law, who was swinging negligently with one hand on the ventilator rope. When he at last dropped to the floor, Minton rubbed his eyes and looked around him in a dazed way.

“My God!” he muttered. “How do I come to be like this—this? Where’s my shirt?”

“You should be ashamed of yourself, sir,” said the Commissioner sternly. “What have you been drinking in your soda-water?”

“Nothing,” said Minton, putting on his shirt. “I drank nothing but soda-water. What possessed me to make such an ass of myself I can’t tell. I beg your pardon, Koomadhi. I assure you I didn’t mean to—why, it all appears like a dream to me.”

“Oh, a dream ! Good night, Dr Koomadhi,” said the Commissioner. “I’m sorry that anything should happen——”

“Don’t say another word, sir, I entreat of you,” cried Koomadhi. “I fear that I was, after all, the most to blame. I should have known where this sort of horse-play was likely to land us. Good night, sir ; I really feel that an apology should come from me. Good night, Minton. No, no ; don’t say a word. I feel that I have disgraced myself for ever.”

Minton, now clothed and in his right mind, saw him off, and then returned to the presence of his father-in-law. He knew that the Commissioner was desirous of having a word or two with him, and he was not the man to run away from such an interview. In fact, he himself was anxious to have the first word ; and he had it.

“Look here, sir,” he said; “I want to say that I know I made an infernal fool of myself. Why I did it I can’t tell; I touched nothing but soda-water all night.”

“Then there is the less excuse for your behaviour,” said the Commissioner drily. “I don’t want to say anything more about this unhappy business. Only, I will point out to you that Koomadhi could easily make things very disagreeable for us if he were so minded. You threw him on the floor. Heavens above!”

“I suppose I did throw him; but why?—why?—why?—that’s what I want to know.”

“Perhaps an explanation may come to you in the course of a day or two. You had better go to bed now.”

“Yes; I’ll go to bed. Only — of course there’s no reason why you should let the matter go farther.”

“I certainly, for my own sake and yours, will keep it as secret as possible. I only hope that Koomadhi——”

“Oh, Koomadhi is all right. But I don’t see that Gertrude or Letts should hear anything of it.”

“They don’t hear anything of it from me, I promise you. Will you ring for the lamps to be turned out?”

Dick Minton pulled the bell. His father-in-law went to his bed without a word.

But an hour had passed before Dick went to his room. He lit a cigar and strolled away from the Residency to the brink of the sea; and there, on the low scrub, looking out to the enormous rollers that broke on the shallow beach two miles from where he stood, spreading their white foam all around, he tried to think how it was he had been led to behave more foolishly than he had ever behaved since the days of his youth.

He was not successful in his attempts in this direction.

And Dr Koomadhi also remained thinking his thoughts for fully half an hour after reaching that pleasant verandah of his, which got every breath that came inland from the sea.

“I can do it easily enough—yes, in his presence; but what good is that to me?” he muttered. “No good whatever—just the op-

posite. I must have the Khabela—ah, the Khabela! That works miles apart.”

Two days later he paid his visit to the Residency and drank tea with Mrs Minton. He told her that he found it necessary to go up country for ten days or so. He knew of a nice miasma tract, and he hoped to gain in a few days as much information regarding its operations on the human frame as he could obtain in as many years in the comparative salubriousness of the coast.

Her husband did not put in an appearance while Koomadhi was in the drawing-room. His wife reproached him for that.

He took her reproach meekly.

XI.

Moonlight was flooding the forest beyond the native village of Moumbossa on the Upper Gambia, but where Dr Koomadhi was walking no moonbeam penetrated. The branches formed an arch above him as dense with interwoven boughs and thick leaves as though the arch was a railway tunnel. Only in

the far distance a gleam of light could be seen.

At times the deep silence of the night was broken by the many sounds of the tropical jungle. Every sound was familiar to Dr Koomadhi, and he laughed joyously as one laughs on recognising the voice of a friend. The wild shriek of a monkey pounced upon by some other creature, the horrible laugh of a hyena, the yell of a lory, and then a deep silence. He felt at home in the midst of that forest, though when he spoke of home within the hearing of civilised people, he meant it to be understood that he referred to England.

When he emerged from the brake he found himself gazing at a solitary beehive hut in the centre of a great cleared space. A quarter of a mile away the moonlight showed him the village of Moumbossa, with its lines of palms and plantains.

He walked up to the hut without removing his rifle from his shoulder, and stood for some moments at the entrance. Then he heard a voice saying to him in the tongue of the Ashantees—

“Enter, my son, and let thy mother see if thy face is changed.”

“I cannot enter, mother,” he replied in the same language. “But I have come far and in peril to talk with you. We must talk together in the moonlight.”

He retained among his other memories a vivid recollection of the interior of a native hut. He could not bring himself to face the ordeal of entering the one before him.

“I will soon be beside you,” came the voice ; and in a few moments there crawled out from the entering-place a half-naked old negress, of great stature, and with only the smallest perceptible stoop. She walked round Dr Koomadhi, and then looked into his face with a laugh.

“Yes,” she said, “it is indeed you, my son, and I see that you need my services.”

“You are right, mother,” said he. “I wondered if you still retained your old powers. That is why I stood for some minutes outside the hut. I said, ‘If my mother has still her messengers in the air, and in the earth, they will tell her that her son has come to her once more.’”

“You should not have doubted,” she said. “Do you fancy that such powers as have come to me by the possession of the Sacred Khabela can decay by reason of age or the weight of days?”

“If that had been my belief, should I have come to you this night?” he asked. “I have need of all your powers. I have need of all the powers of the Khabela.”

“You shall have all that I can command: are you not my son?” said the old woman. “But have you found the Sacred Ear to fail you?”

“Never, mother,” said Dr Koomadhi. “You told me what it could do, and it has never failed me within its limits. But I must have the more powerful charm of the Sacred Mouth. My need is extreme.”

“It must be extreme, and I will not deny it to you,” said his mother. “You know what it can do. No man or woman can withstand it. If any offspring of woman should hold that Sacred Mouth to his ear, or her ear, as the case may be, the words which you whisper into the Sacred Ear will seem the truth, whatever those words may be. You know that. But the

magic of the Khabela is far greater. It will work at a distance. But if it is lost you know what the consequences will be. You know the decree of the great Fanshatee, the monkey-god?"

"I know it. The stone Khabela shall not be lost. I accept the responsibility. I must have command over it until the return of the moon."

"And thou shalt have control of it, whether for good or evil. It told me that thou wert nigh to-night, so that thou must have the Ear charm in thy possession even now."

"It is here, mother, in this pocket. I have shown it to no mortal whose colour is not as our colour, whose hair is not as our hair."

"The white men laugh at all magic such as ours, I have heard."

"Yes, they laugh at it. But some of them practise a form of it themselves. I have seen one practise it in a great room in England. Without the aid of a mystic stone he told sober men that they were drunk, and they acted as drunk men; he told rough fellows that they were priests, and they preached sermons

as long and as stupid as any that we have heard missionaries preach."

"And yet they say that our magic is a thing accursed."

"Yes; that is the way with the white men. When they have said their word 'damn' on any matter, they believe that the last word has been said upon it, and all that other men may say they laugh at."

"They are fools, my son; and thou art a fool to dwell among them."

"They are wise men up to a certain point. They are only fools on the subject of names. They say that magic is accursed; but they say that hypnotism is science, and science is the only thing in which they believe." He had some trouble translating the word hypnotism into the native speech. "Enough about them. Let me have the mystery, and then let me have a cake that has been baked in the earth with the leaves of the betel."

"Thou shalt have both, my son, before the morning light. Enter my hut, and I will dream that thou art a child again."

But that was just where Dr Koomadhi drew

the line. He would not crawl into the hut even to make his venerable mother fancy that his youth was renewed like the eagles.

He returned to Picotee the next day, and as he walked through the forest each side of the bush track was lined with monkeys. They came from far and near and put their faces down to the ground, their fore-hands at the back of their heads.

He talked to them in simian.

“Yes,” he said. “Ye know that I am the holder of the Khabela, intrusted to me by my brother Fanshatee; but if I lose it your attitude will not be the same.”

XII.

Two days had passed, after his return to Picotee, before Dr Koomadhi found time to call at the Residency. He found Major Minton lying on the cane settee in a condition of perspiration and exhaustion.

“I’m sure Dr Koomadhi will bear me out in what I say,” said Mrs Minton, as the Doctor entered the room. “I’ve been lecturing my

husband upon the danger of taking such violent exercise as he has been indulging in," she continued. "Just look at the state that he is in, Doctor. The idea of any sane man on a day like this entering into a climbing contest with a monkey!"

"Great heavens! Is that what he has been about—and the thermometer nearer a hundred than ninety?" cried the Doctor.

"I admit that I was an ass," muttered the Major. "But somehow I felt that I should show Jacco that I could lick him on his own ground,—not exactly his ground—we were never on the ground."

"And when I went out I found them swinging on the topmost bough of one of the trees," said Mrs Minton. "Upon my word, my father will feel scandalised. Such a thing never occurred at the Residency before."

"Apart from the social aspect of the incident, I am bound to say that it was most indiscreet," said Dr Koomadhi. "Nothing precipitates sun-stroke like over-exertion in a high temperature. Major, this must not occur again."

"All right: don't make a fuss, or you'll soon

be as hot as I am," said the Major, rising with difficulty and crossing the room—he was bent almost double—to his wife's tea-table.

"Hallo," said the Doctor, "what have you been doing to yourself?"

"It is not what I have been doing but what I've left undone that you notice," laughed the Major. "The fact is that I couldn't be bothered shaving for the last few mornings. That's what you notice."

That was precisely what the Doctor did notice. He noticed the tossed hair of the Major's head and such bristles of a beard and whiskers as had completely altered the appearance of his face. He also noticed that when Mrs Minton turned away for a moment her husband deftly abstracted two lumps of sugar from the bowl and began eating them surreptitiously.

"No nuts," he heard him mutter contemptuously some time afterwards.

"Nuts?" said Mrs Minton. "You'll ruin your digestion if you eat any more nuts, Dick. Dr Koomadhi, will you join your voice with mine in protest against this foolish boy's fancy

for nuts? You speak with the recognised authority of a medical man. I can only speak as a wife, and I am not so foolish as to fancy that that constitutes any claim to attention. If you continue rubbing your chest in that absurd way, Dick, you'll certainly make a raw."

Dr Koomadhi did not fail to observe that the Major was rubbing his chest with his bent-up fingers.

"I'm quite surprised at your imprudence," said he, shaking his head. "You told me some time ago that though you had been for seven years in India, you never had a touch of fever, and you attributed this to the attention you paid to your diet. Now you know as well as I do that if a man requires to be careful in India, there is double reason for him to be careful on the West Coast of Africa. How can you so disregard the most elementary laws of health?"

Major Minton laughed.

"There's nothing like exercise," he said, "and the best of all exercise is climbing. Why, my dear Koomadhi, haven't the greatest intellects of the age taken to climbing? Wasn't

Tyndall a splendid mountaineer? I don't profess to be superior to Tyndall. Now, as I can't get mountains to climb in this neighbourhood I take naturally to the trees. I think sometimes I could pass the rest of my life pleasantly enough here. Man wants but little here below. Give me a branch to swing on, a green coconut, and a friend who won't resent a practical joke—I want nothing more. By the way, it's odd that I never saw until lately—in fact, until two days ago—what good fun there is in a practical joke.”

“His perception of what he calls good fun deprived me of my brushes and comb this morning,” said Mrs Minton. “I must confess I fail to see the humour in hiding one's brushes and comb.”

“It was the most innocent lark in the world, and you had no reason to be so put out about it,” said her husband, leaning over the back of her chair. Dr Koomadhi saw that he was tying the sash of her loose gown to the wickerwork of the table at which she was sitting, so that she could not rise without overturning the tray with the cups.

“My dear Major,” said the Doctor, “a jest is a jest, but your wife’s china——”

“Oh, you have given me away; but I’ll be equal to you, never fear,” said the Major, shambling off as his wife prepared to loose the knot of her sash from the table.

She did not speak a word, but her face was flushed, and it was plain that she was greatly annoyed. The flush upon her face deepened when her husband went out to the verandah and uttered a curious guttural cry.

“How has he learned that?” asked Dr Koomadhi.

“Learned what?” asked Mrs Minton.

“That cry.”

“Oh, it’s some of his foolishness.”

“I daresay; but——”

“Ah, I thought I could bring you here, my friend,” cried the Major, as Jacco the baboon swung off his usual place over the porch into his arms.

Dr Koomadhi watched the creature run its fingers through the Major’s disordered hair. He heard the guttural sound made by the baboon, and he heard it responded to by the Major.

He found that Major Minton was on a level with himself in his acquaintance with the simian language.

He rose and took leave of Mrs Minton, and then, with a word of warning in regard to his imprudent exercises, of the Major, left the Residency.

It was not until he had reached his own house that he discovered that upon the back of his spotless linen coat there had been executed in ink the grinning face of a clown. He recollected that he had seen Major Minton toying with a quill pen behind him as he sat drinking tea.

XIII.

A few days later Dr Koomadhi was visited—unofficially—by Commander Hope. The poor Commissioner was as grave as if an impetuous French naval officer had just been reported to have insulted the British flag on some part of the coast protected (nominally) by that variegated bunting. He was anxious to consult the Doctor regarding the condition of Major Minton.

“Indeed?” said the Doctor. “What do

you suppose is the matter with him, sir?"

The Commissioner tapped his forehead significantly.

"A slight touch of sunstroke, I fancy," he replied. "He has been behaving strangely—giving us a great deal of uneasiness, Koomadhi. Oh yes, it's clearly a touch of sunstroke."

"That's bad—but not sufficiently bad to be very grave about, sir," said the Doctor. "You know how these attacks pass away, leaving scarcely a trace behind, if properly treated. You have, of course, applied the ice?"

"We've applied nothing," said the Commissioner. "He's beyond our control, Koomadhi. He left the Residency last evening and has not turned up since."

"Great heavens!"

"It's a fact. Oh, he must be stark, staring mad"—the Commissioner was walking up and down the Doctor's room in a state of most unofficial perturbation. "I found it necessary to speak to him pretty plainly a couple of days ago. It was bad enough for him to climb up the mast and nail the flag to the pole so that

it could not be hauled down at sunset, but when it comes to dropping the keys of the despatch-boxes into the water-tank, the thing ceases to be a joke. I gave him a good slating, and he sulked. He had an idea, his wife told me, that he understood the simian language, and he was for ever practising his knowledge upon our tame baboon. What on earth does that mean, if not sunstroke—tell me that, Koomadhi?”

“It looks very like sunstroke, indeed,” said the Doctor. “But where can he have disappeared to?”

“That’s the question that makes me feel uneasy,” said the Commissioner. “I don’t like to make a fuss just yet, but—I’ll tell you what it is, Koomadhi,”—he lowered his voice to a whisper,—“the man has a delusion that he is an ape—it’s impossible to keep it a secret any longer. God help us all! God help my poor girl—my poor girl!”

The Commissioner broke down completely, and wept with his face bowed down to his hands. He was very unofficial—tears are not official.

“Come, sir, you must not give way like this,” said the Doctor. “This coast is the very devil for men like Minton, who will not take reasonable precautions. But there’s no reason to be alarmed just yet. The *Penguin* will be here in a few days, and the instant the steamer drops her anchor we’ll ship him aboard. He’ll be all right, take my word for it, when he sails a few degrees northward.”

“But where is he now?”

“He’s probably loafing around the outskirts of the jungle; but he’ll be safe enough, and he’ll return, most likely, within the next few hours.”

“You are of that opinion?”

“Assuredly. Above all things, there must be no talk about this business,—it might ruin him socially; and your daughter——”

“Poor girl! poor girl! I agree with you, Koomadhi,—it must be kept a secret; no human being must know about this shocking business.”

“If he does not return before to-night, send a message to me, sir.”

“I’ll not fail. Poor girl! Oh, Koomadhi,

her heart will be broken—her heart will be broken !”

The Commissioner went away, looking at least ten years older than when he had last been seen by Dr Koomadhi.

The Doctor watched him stumbling down the pathway : then he laughed and opened a bottle of champagne, which he drank at a gulp—it was only when he was alone that he allowed himself the luxury of drinking champagne in gulps.

Shortly before midnight he paid a visit to the barracks of the Houssas, and found that the officer who was on the sick list was very much better. Returning by the side of the jungle, he heard the sound of steps and a laugh behind him. It might have been the laugh of a man, but the steps were not those of a man.

He looked round.

A shambling creature was following him—a creature with a hairy face and matted locks—a creature whose eyes gleamed wildly in the moonlight.

“How the mischief can you walk so fast

along a path like this?" came the voice of Major Minton from the hairy jaws of the Thing.

"I'm not walking so fast, after all," said the Doctor. He had not given the least start on coming face to face with the Thing.

"I don't care much about walking on roads; but I'll back myself to cross a forest without leaving the trees," said the Thing. "That would beat you, Koomadhi. Oh, by the way——" Here he emitted some guttural sounds.

The simian language was recognised by the Doctor, and replied to with a smile, and for some time the two exchanged remarks. The Doctor was the first to break down.

"I don't understand that expression," said he, when the other had repeated some sounds.

"Why, you fool, that means, 'Is there anything to drink handy?'" said the voice of Major Minton. "Why, I know more of the language than you. We've been talking nothing else for the past day or two."

"Where have you been?"

“In the jungle. Where else would you have me be?”

“Where, indeed? You’d better stay with me to-night. I’ll give you something to drink.”

“That will suit me nicely. I’m a bit thirsty, and——” Here he lapsed into the simian jabber.

He curled himself up in a corner of the sofa, and took the tumbler that Dr Koomadhi offered to him, drinking off the contents pretty much after the style of the Doctor when alone. He then began talking about the sense of freedom incidental to a life spent in the jungle, and every now and again his words became what was long ago known as gibberish; but nearly every utterance was intelligible to the Doctor.

After some time had passed, the Doctor took the carved stones out of the desk drawer, and, handing one to his companion, said—

“By the way, I wonder if you are still deaf to the sound of this thing. Try it again.”

“What’s the good? I’m not such a fool as to fancy that any sound can come from a stone.”

“Doesn’t Shakespeare say something about ‘sermons in stones’?”

“Oh, Shakespeare? He could hear things and see things that no one else could. Well, give me the stone.”

He put the roughly carved lips to his ear, while the Doctor raised the other to his own mouth.

“You can hear no murmur?” said the Doctor.

“Nothing whatever. I think, if you don’t mind, I’ll go asleep.”

“I can give you a bed.”

“A bed? What rot! No, thank you, I’ll be comfortable enough here.”

He curled himself up and went asleep before the Doctor’s eyes.

When the Doctor entered his sitting-room the next morning the apartment was empty.

XIV.

“I was a fool for not detaining him by force,” said Dr Koomadhi, in telling the Commissioner, a few hours later, that his son-in-law had paid

a visit to his (the Doctor's) house. "But there really is nothing to be alarmed about. He has a whim, but he'll soon tire of it."

"I hope to heavens he'll return by to-morrow evening," said the Commander. "The *Penguin* will be here in the morning, and we must get him aboard by some means. What a pity you didn't lock him in."

"To tell you the truth, I was afraid to do so—if he had made a row in the morning on feeling himself a prisoner the thing would be over the town before noon. Oh, you may be certain that he'll turn up again either to-day or to-morrow."

That night one of the officers of the Houssas gave Dr Koomadhi a circumstantial account of a strange chimpanzee which one of the men had seen on the outskirts of the jungle at day-break. If the thing wasn't a chimpanzee it certainly was a gorilla, the officer said, and he meant to have a shot at it. Would the Doctor join him in the hunt? he inquired.

The Doctor said he would be delighted to do so, but not before the next evening, he had so much on hand.

The *Penguin's* gun was heard early in the morning, and Dr Koomadhi had the privilege of reading his 'Saturday Review' at breakfast.

He went to the Residency before noon. The Commissioner was not there. He had gone aboard the *Penguin*, Mr Letts, the Secretary, said, without looking up from his paper.

"I wonder if you know anything about Minton, Mr Letts," whispered Koomadhi.

"I wonder if you know anything about him, Dr Koomadhi," said Mr Letts.

"He has not been near me since the night before last," said the Doctor. "Has he been here?"

Before the Secretary could reply a servant knocked at the office door conveying Mrs Minton's compliments to Dr Koomadhi, and to inquire if he would be good enough to step into the breakfast-room until the Commissioner returned from the mail steamer.

Dr Koomadhi said he would be pleased to do so, and he left the office and followed the servant into the breakfast-room—an apartment which occupied one end of the Residency, and had windows opening upon the verandah, and

affording a view of that portion of the jungle which was nearest Picotee.

He scarcely recognised Gertrude Minton. The deadly pale, worn woman who greeted him silently, had nothing in common with the brilliant daughter of the Commissioner who, a few months before, had been as exquisite as a lily in the midst of a jungle.

“What are we to do—what are we to do?” she whispered. “You have seen him since we saw him. What did he say? Will he return in time to be put aboard the steamer? Oh, for God’s sake, give me a word of hope—one word to keep me from going mad too!”

“Mrs Minton,” said Dr Koomadhi, “you have asked me a great many questions. May I remind you that I never asked but one question of you?”

“One question? What do you mean?”

“I asked you if you thought you could marry me. What was your answer?”

“Why do you come here to remind me of that? If you are thinking of that fault of mine—it was cruel, I know, but I did not mean it—if you are thinking of that rather

than of the best way to help us, you had much better have stayed away."

"You said you would as soon marry a baboon as marry me."

"I checked myself."

"When you had practically said it."

"Well, what then?"

"Nothing; you did not marry me, and the alternative was your own choice."

"The alternative?"

"Yes; you married a baboon. You know it. Is there any doubt on your mind? Come to this window."

He had suddenly crossed the room to a window facing the jungle. She staggered to his side. He threw open the shutter and pointed out.

What Mrs Minton saw was a huge ape running on all fours across the cleared space just outside the jungle. The creature ran on for some distance, then stopped and turned round gibbering. Then from the jungle there came another ape, only in a more upright posture. With a yell he caught the hand of the first, and the creature stood upright. Then,

hand in hand, in a horribly grotesque dance, they advanced together until they were within a hundred yards of the Residency.

“You see—you see,” laughed Dr Koomadhi. “You may still be able to recognise some of his features in spite of the transformation. You have had your choice. A baboon is your husband, and your child——”

The shriek that the woman gave before falling to the floor frightened even Dr Koomadhi.

In a second the room door was opened. Mr Letts appeared. He rushed at Dr Koomadhi, and had his hands on his throat before the Doctor could raise Mrs Minton. He forced the negro backward into the porch, and flung him out almost upon the Commissioner and Mr Ross, the surgeon of the *Penguin*, who were in the act of entering.

“For heaven’s sake, Letts!” cried the Commissioner.

“You infernal nigger!” shouted Letts, as Dr Koomadhi picked himself up. “You infernal nigger! if ever you show your face here again, I’ll break every bone in your body!”

“What the blazes is the matter?” asked Ross.

“I believe that that devil has killed Mrs Minton,” said the Secretary. “If he has, by God! I’ll kill him.”

XV.

Dr Koomadhi went to his house in dignified silence. He put a couple of glasses of brandy into a bottle of champagne and gulped down the whole. Then he wrote a short note to the officer of the Houssas, mentioning that he would be happy to help him to shoot the great ape at daybreak.

He sent off the letter, and before he closed his desk he thought he would restore the carved stones to their receptacle. He had put them into his pocket before starting for the Residency; but now when he felt for them in his pocket he failed to find them. He was overcome with the fear that he had lost them. It suddenly occurred to him that they had been thrown out of his pocket by the violence of the man who had flung him into the road. If so,

they would be lying on the pathway, and they would be safe enough there until dark, when he could go and search for them.

At moonrise he went out and walked down the road to the Residency, but when just at the porch he was confronted by Ross, who was leaving the house.

“Hallo!” cried the surgeon. “I was just about to stroll up to you.”

“And I was determined not to miss you,” said Koomadhi. “How is Mrs Minton? It will be brain fever, I’m afraid.”

“It looks very like it,” said Ross. “She is delirious. How did the attack come? That fool of a Secretary will give no explanation of his conduct to you. The Commissioner says he will either apologise or leave the station.”

“The Secretary is a fool,” said Koomadhi. “Great heavens! to think that there are still some men like that—steeped to the lips in prejudice against the race to which I am proud to belong! We’ll not talk of him; but I’ll certainly demand an apology. The poor woman—she is little more than a girl, Ross!

The breaking strain was reached when she was in the act of telling me about her husband."

"Sunstroke, I suppose?"

"Undoubtedly. He has been behaving queerly for some time. Walk back with me and have something to drink."

"I can only stay for an hour," said Ross. "Mrs Bryson, the wife of the telegraphist, is nursing Mrs Minton; but it won't do for me to be absent for long."

He remained chatting with Koomadhi for about an hour, and then left for the Residency alone.

Dr Koomadhi determined to wait until midnight, when he might be pretty certain that his search for the stones would not be interrupted.

The door of the Residency was opened for Mr Ross by Letts.

"Step this way, Ross," said he, in a low voice.

Ross went into the Secretary's room. Sitting on a cane chair with a cigar in his mouth and a tall glass at his elbow was a man from whom

came a strong perfume of shaving-soap. The man had plainly been recently shaved. His face was very smooth.

“Hallo, Ross, old chap!” said this man.

“My God, it’s Minton!” cried the surgeon.

“No one else,” said Minton. “What is all this about my poor wife? Don’t tell me that it’s serious.”

“It’s serious enough,” said Ross. “But, unless a change for the worse comes before morning, there is no reason for alarm.”

“Thank God!” said Minton. “What a fool I was to set about investigating that monkey language! I fancied that I had mastered a word or two, and I ventured into the jungle and got lost. I returned here an hour ago in a woful state of dilapidation. I’m getting better every minute. For God’s sake let me know how my poor wife is now!”

“I’ll get your report, Ross, to save your leaving the room,” said Letts.

The Secretary took the surgeon into an empty apartment.

“He returned three-quarters of an hour ago,” he said, in a low voice. “I never got such a

shock as when I saw him—luckily I was at the door. He was practically naked; and with his hair tangled over his head, and his face one mass of bristles, he was to all intents and purposes a baboon. That nigger is at the bottom of it all. I followed him when he visited Mrs Minton this morning, and I even brought myself to listen outside the door of the breakfast-room, where they had an interview. I overheard enough to convince me that the ruffian had made Minton the victim of some of his hellish magic. I've been long enough on the West Coast to know what some of the niggers can do in this way. I have questioned Minton adroitly, and he admitted to me that Koomadhi had put a certain stone carved like a human ear into his hand, and had induced him to place it at his own ear. That was the famous Sacred Ear stone that the Ashantees speak of in whispers."

"We'll talk more of this to-morrow," said Ross. "I don't believe much in negro magic; but — my God! what is the meaning of that?"

A window was open in the room, and through

it there came the sound of a shot, followed by appalling yells: then came another shot, and such a wild chorus of shrieking as far surpassed in volume the first series.

XVI.

Letts ran to a cupboard and whipped out a revolver. He rushed outside without a word. Ross followed him: he felt that wherever a revolver was going he should go also.

The two men ran in the moonlight toward Koomadhi's house, for the yells were still coming from that direction. When they got within sight of the house Letts cried out in amazement. By the light of the full moon the strangest sight that he had ever seen was before his eyes. Koomadhi's house was invisible; but where it should have been there was an enormous pyramid of jabbering apes. They were so thick upon the roof and the verandah as to conceal every portion of the building, and hundreds were on the pathway around the place. The noise they made was appalling.

Letts and the surgeon crouched behind a

cane-brake and watched that strange scene ; but they had not been long in concealment before the creatures began trooping off to the jungle. Baboons, chimpanzees, and gorillas, more horrible than had ever been depicted, were rushing from the house yelling and gibbering with grotesque gestures beneath the light of the moon.

Before the last of the monstrous procession had disappeared—while the shrieks of the wild parrots were still filling the air—the two men left their place of concealment and hurried toward the house. They had to struggle through an odour of monkeys that would have overpowered most men. A glance was sufficient to show them that the shutters of the room in which Koomadhi slept had been torn away. Letts sprang through the open window, and Ross heard his cry of horror before he followed him—before he saw the ghastly sight that the moonlight revealed. The body of Dr Koomadhi lay torn and mangled upon the floor, his empty revolver still warm in his hand. Around him lay the carcasses of four enormous apes, with bullet-holes in their breasts.

“Ross,” said Letts after a long pause, “there is a stronger power still than the devil even on the West Coast of Africa.”

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“Women, I have often heard, have strange notions at times,” said Major Minton, leaning over the deck-chair under the awning of the *Penguin*, where his wife was sitting, “but that fancy which you say you had before your attack beats the record. Still, I was greatly to blame. I’ll never forgive myself. I had no business interesting myself in that simian jabber. If at any time I feel a craving in such a direction I’ll get an order for the Strangers’ Gallery of the House of Commons when a debate on an Irish question is going on. Poor Koomadhi! Letts declared that, as he lay among the dead apes, it was difficult to say whether he was an ape or a man.”

THE GHOST OF BARMOUTH MANOR.

“I WOULDN’T make a fuss about it if I were you,” said Charlie Craven, pursuing that search from pocket to pocket which men, having no particular reputation for tidiness to maintain, are accustomed to institute when they have filled a pipe and are anxious to light it.

“A fuss about it?” cried his sister Madge. “A fuss—good gracious! What is there to make a fuss about in all that I have told you? A dream—I ask you candidly if you think that I am the sort of girl to make a fuss over a dream?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” said Charlie. He had succeeded in finding in one of his pockets a match-box—an empty match-box.

“Well, you should know,” said Madge severely.

“There now, you are making a fuss over

something a deal flimsier than your dream," laughed her brother. "I wonder if that palace of your dream was no better supplied than this house with matches: if it wasn't, I shouldn't care to live in it for any length of time."

"It's so like a man to keep on bothering himself and every one about him for a match, while all the time a fire is roaring on the hearth behind him, and his pockets are full of bills—the usual Christmas bills, the least of which would light all the pipes he smokes in a day, and that's saying a good deal."

"How clever you are! I never thought of the fire. Well, as I was remarking, I wouldn't bother telling my dreams to any one if I were you. Dreams—well, dreams are all rot, you know."

"I'm not quite so sure of that as you seem to be, O wisest of brothers. The wisest of people in the world—next to you, of course—have thought that there was something in dreams, haven't they?"

"They were wrong. My aunt! the rot that I have dreamt from time to time!"

"Oh, that settles the question."

“It does, so far as I am concerned. Look here, Madge ; don’t come to me again with the story of your dreams, hoping to find a sympathetic ear. Dreams, I say, are all—— Of course, you saw that particular house and that particular staircase in some picture, and they stuck somewhere at the back of your brain. It’s a rummy thing the brain, you know—a jolly rum thing !”

“It is. I am becoming more impressed every minute with the truth of that discovery of yours.”

“Oh, if you are becoming sarcastic, I have nothing more to say. But please to remember that sarcasm is no argument. I tell you, my dear girl, you have seen a picture of that house at some period of your life—I don’t say recently, mind you—and my theory is that the brain is like a sensitized plate : it records an impression once and for all, and stores it away, and you never know exactly when it means to bring it out again before your eyes. Oh, believe me, it plays a lot of tricks upon even the most commonplace people.”

“Among whom I suppose I must count myself? Well, I daresay you are right.”

“I know that I am right. Dreams! Did you ever hear the story of the old woman who won a big prize in a lottery, the ticket being No. 26? Had she chosen that number on chance or in accordance with some system? she was asked, and she replied that she had dreamt it all out. Dreamt it all out? What did she mean by that? they inquired. ‘Well, a week ago I dreamt that I won the prize, and that the ticket I took was No. 9,’ said she. ‘The next night I dreamt exactly the same, and the ticket was No. 9. The third night the same thing happened, so, of course, I chose No. 26.’ ‘No. 26? Why not No. 9 as you dreamt it?’ the people asked. ‘Oh, you fools!’ said she; ‘didn’t I tell you that I dreamt it three times? the number was 9, and doesn’t every one know that three times 9 are 26?’ Now that’s the stuff that dreams are made of, as Shakespeare remarks, so don’t you bother about this particular vision of yours; and if you take my advice you’ll say nothing to Uncle Philip or the lot of them about it. They would only laugh at you.”

“Why on earth should I go about proclaiming my dream to all our relations?” cried the girl. “Dear Charlie, I’m not suffering just yet from softening of the brain. Besides, I can recall many instances of disaster following people who bored others with the story of their dreams. There was the notable case of Joseph and his brethren, and later in history there was the case of the Duke of Clarence. You remember how swiftly retribution followed his story of his dream? Now, of course, my dream was only a little insignificant thing compared to Joseph’s and Clarence’s, still something might happen if I bored people with it—something proportionate—the plum-pudding might come to the table in a state of squash, or the custards might be smoked. Oh no, I’ll be forewarned, and talk only of facts. I suppose a dream cannot, by even the most indulgent of people, be called a fact.”

“I’m off to the stables,” said her brother, after a little pause.

Then he went off to the stables. He was an excellent fellow and the best of brothers, although he was more at home in the stables

than when engaged in a discussion on a subject involving some exercise of the imagination. There is not much room in a stable for a play of the imagination, especially where the corn accounts are kept on a system.

When he had left the breakfast-room on this bright Christmas morning his sister paused for a few moments in her morning duty of collecting a breakfast for the birds which were loitering about the Italian balustrade in front of the window, reminding her, in their own way, that they expected an exceptionally liberal repast on this Christmas morning: she paused and began to think once more upon this strange dream of hers, which she had been rehearsing to her brother.

After all, it was not so strange a dream, she reflected. The only queer thing about it was that it had come to her on every Christmas Eve for five consecutive years—since she was seventeen—and that its details did not differ in the least from one year to another. Perhaps it was also different from the majority of dreams in its vividness, and in the fact that, on awaking from it, she felt as exhausted as if she had just

returned from a long journey. Even now it required almost an effort on her part to walk round the old oak table sweeping the crumbs on to a plate to throw to the birds ; and when she had discharged this duty she seated herself with a sigh of relief in one of the arm-chairs that stood by the side of the great wood fire.

She closed her eyes and once again recalled her dream. She had no difficulty in doing so. She had fancied herself in the act of driving up to a fine old house, standing in the middle of a well-timbered park of oak and chestnut. The lawn extended across the full front of the mansion, and in the centre she noticed a beautiful old fountain, composed of a great marble basin with a splendid group of figures in the centre—Neptune with his dolphins and a Naiad or two. She passed into the house through a great hall hung with trophies of war and of the chase. In front of her was the enormous head of a moose, and at one side there was a great grey skull of some animal such as she had never seen before,—a fearful thing with huge tusks—quite the monster of a dream.

Then she seemed to go from room to room, as if she had been a member of the family living in the place, but—and this she felt to be a true dream-touch—the moment she entered a room every one who was there fled from her; but apparently this did not cause her any surprise, any more than did the strange costume of the figures who fled at her approach—costumes of the sixteenth century, mingled with those of the seventeenth and eighteenth. Thinking of the figures hurrying from every room suggested to her the family portraits of three centuries in motion. After visiting several fine rooms she found herself walking up a broad oaken staircase of shallow steps, until she came to a large lobby, where the staircase divided to right and left. There she found a curious settee of some dark wood, the long centre panel of which was carved with many figures. She saw all this by the aid of the moonlight which flowed in through the panes of coloured glass in a high window, painted with many coats of arms.

She remembered having rested in this seat for some time, feeling very lonely, and then some

one had come to her, sitting by her side and taking her hand, saying—

“I have been waiting for you all these years. I am so glad that you are here at last.”

She remembered that the sound of the voice and the touch of the hand had banished her loneliness, and made her feel happier than she had ever felt in all her life before. Even now she felt supremely happy, recalling this incident of her dream, though she recollected that she had not yet seen the face of the man who had come to her to banish her loneliness. She wished that her dream had been less whimsical in this one particular. She felt that she could have spared some of the other details that came before her so vividly—the skull of that strange animal that hung in the hall, for instance—if in their place she had been allowed to see what manner of man it was who had sat with her.

Still, the recollection of him gave her pleasure even when the dream had first come to her and he had come in the dream, and this pleasure had been increasing year by year, until she knew that she had actually gone asleep on the previous night, full of joy in the hope of hearing the

sound of that voice and feeling the touch of that hand as she had done in the past.

And that was the end of her dream, unless the feeling of happiness—happiness mingled with a certain sadness—of which she was conscious while she recalled its details should be accounted part of the dream. Her pleasure was the same as one experiences in recalling the incidents of a visit to a dear friend; her sadness was the same as one experiences on thinking that a long time must elapse before one can see that friend again.

Madge actually found herself reflecting that a year must pass before she could once more find herself wandering through the strange mansion of her dream—find herself once more seated on that carved seat in the lobby beneath the painted window.

She kept on thinking, and wondering as she thought, over the strange features of this experience of hers. She knew that she was what people would call a commonplace, practical girl—a girl without fads or fancies of any sort. Since her mother's death, three years before, she had managed all the household affairs of

Craven Court for her brother, who had inherited the property before she had left the schoolroom. Every one was bound to acknowledge that her management of the household had been admirable, though only her brother knew exactly how admirable it was.

“There are no frills about Madge; she is the best woman of business in the county, and we have none of the bothers of other people with our servants,” he had frequently said.

And yet here was this embodiment of all that is practical in life, dreaming upon a dream upon this bright and frosty Christmas morning, and actually feeling sad at the thought that a whole year must elapse before the same vision should return to her.

The chiming of the church bells startled her out of her reverie.

“Pshaw!” she cried, jumping up from her chair; “I am quite as great a goose as Charlie believes me to be—quite! or I should not have told him that that dream had come to me again. I should have had the sense to know that he would have the sense to know that dreams are, one and all, the utterest folly!”

She knew that she was trying to convince herself that there was nothing more in this particular dream than in the many casual dreams that came to her as well as to other people ; but before she had reached the door of the dining-room she knew that she had failed in her attempt. The curious fatigue of which she was conscious, quickly told her that this oft-recurring vision was not as others were.

She went to church with her brother, and in the afternoon their uncle, Colonel Craven, and his wife duly arrived at the Court to spend their annual week at the family mansion, and Madge took her brother's advice and refrained from saying a word to either of them on the subject of her dream. Indeed, she had so much to think of and so much to do during the week, she had no time to give to anything so immaterial as a dream, however interesting it might be to herself.

On the last morning of the stay of Colonel and Mrs Craven at Craven Court, the former received a letter which he tossed across the breakfast-table to Charlie.

“ Funny, isn't it ? ” he said. “ We were talk-

ing about wild-duck-shooting no later than last night, and here's a letter from Jack Tremaine telling me that he is taking over his cousin's place for six months and promising me some good sport if I go to him for a week in January. You will see that he suggests that you should be of the party : he asks if you are here. See what he says about the ducks."

"Who is his cousin?" inquired Charlie, "and where is his place?"

"His cousin is a chap named Clifford, and his place is in Dorsetshire—on the coast—Barmouth Manor it is called, and I know that it's famous for its duck-shooting. Tremaine will no doubt write to you."

"Where has the cousin gone, that the place is available for Jack Tremaine?" asked Charlie.

"Turn over the page and you'll see what he says about the Cliffords," replied Colonel Craven.

Charlie found on the last leaf half a dozen lines on the point in question. Jack Tremaine said that Mrs Clifford was not satisfied as to the health of her son, and was going abroad with him during the first week in January.

"I should like to have a go at the ducks," said Charlie Craven, handing back the letter. "I suppose there is a duck-punt or two at the place?"

"You may be sure of that," said his uncle. "Young Clifford is a good sportsman, I believe, but I have never met him. I'll write to Tremaine to-day telling him that you are at home. I'm sure he means to invite you."

All doubt on this point was removed by the arrival two days later of an invitation from Mr Tremaine to Charlie Craven for a fortnight's duck-shooting at Barmouth Manor, and he enclosed a letter from his wife to Madge expressing the hope that she would be able to accompany her brother.

Madge was delighted at the prospect of the visit, for she and Mrs Tremaine were close friends.

The frost which had set in a few days before Christmas had not gone when she and her brother were due at Barmouth Manor, so that there was a likelihood of her having some skating on the lake. Mrs Tremaine had, in her invitation, laid some stress upon the possibility

of a week's skating on the lake which, she said, was within the Manor Park.

A carriage met them at Barmouth Station, for the Manor was quite five miles from the picturesque little town; and it was late in the afternoon before they passed through the spacious entrance gates to the Manor Park. There was, however, quite enough light to enable Madge to see every detail of the place, and it was observing some of the details that caused her to make a rather startling exclamation of surprise.

"Hallo!" said her brother, "what has startled you?"

There was a little pause before she had recovered herself sufficiently to be able to make an excuse that would sound plausible. She pointed to a group of deer looking over the barrier of their enclosure.

"One of the stags," she said; "it seemed for a moment as if it were about to jump the rail."

"What matter if it did? They are as tame as cats at this time of the year," said Charlie.

"Of course, I should have remembered," she

said. "I wonder in what direction is the pond. Does the sunset look promising?"

"There may be no thaw before the end of the month," said he.

That was the end of their conversation, and she flattered herself that he had no notion how excited she was as the carriage reached that part of the drive which was beside the lawn, and the red level rays of the sun streaming through the naked trees stained the marble basin of an Italian fountain, the central group of which was in every detail the same as the figures in the fountain of her dream. In another minute the front of the house was disclosed, and she saw that it was the house of her dream. She would have been greatly disappointed had it been otherwise.

She entered the great hall, and could scarcely reply to the cordial greeting of her aunt and Mrs Tremaine, for she found herself stared at by the sleepy eyes that looked out from the head of a moose just as they had stared at her in her sleep. She turned to the wall on her right. Yes, there was the curious skull with the mighty tusks.

“Oh yes, we had a delightful journey,” she managed to say in reply to Mrs Tremaine’s inquiry. “Thank you; I should like a cup of tea immensely. Do you have it in the hall or in the tapestry room beyond?”

“What; you have been here before? I had no idea of that,” said Mrs Tremaine.

For more than a moment Madge was confused.

Luckily for her, however, the lamps had not been lighted in the hall, and the sudden flush that came over her face was unobserved by her friends.

She gave a laugh.

“What a good shot I made!” she cried. “Isn’t this just the sort of house to have an old - panelled dining - room and a tapestry chamber beside it? I think we should have tea here. What sort of prehistoric creature is that on the wall?”

“I believe it is a skull that was found when they were digging the foundations of one of the lodges,” said Mrs Tremaine.

“I seem to have read some description of this very place,” said Charlie, standing in front of the great skull.

Madge wondered if he would remember enough of her account of the house of her dreams to enable him to recognise the details before him.

“It is fully described in Hall’s History, and in every guide-book of the district. The animal that that skull belonged to lived some thousands of years before the Flood, I understand.”

“What is the exact date B.C. carved on it?” laughed Charlie. “Yes, I daresay I came upon a paragraph or an illustration of the place. No house is safe from the depredations of the magazines nowadays.”

Tea was served in the hall to give Madge’s maid time to unpack; and then the girl was shown to her room. She ran up the broad, shallow staircase to the lobby; she had made up her mind to sit, if only for a moment, on the carved settee; but a surprise awaited her,—no carved settee was there. The painted window was there, but no settee was beneath it.

She was so surprised that she stood for some moments gazing at the vacant place.

“That lobby looks quite bare without the settee, Miss Craven,” said the housekeeper, who

was beside her. "It's a fine bit of carving—all ebony."

"Was there a settee here?" asked Madge innocently.

"It was only taken away to-day to be in a better light for Mrs Tremaine to photograph it," said the housekeeper. "Mrs Tremaine has done most of the rare pieces in the house. This is your room, Miss Craven. It's called the Dauphin's chamber, for it was here he slept fifty years ago when he was in Dorsetshire."

Madge entered the room, remarking that it was beautifully furnished and that it seemed extremely comfortable. When the door was closed she threw herself into a chair and had a good think.

What could it all mean? she asked herself. Why should this house become so associated with her life? Was she going to die here? Was something going to happen to her? Was she to meet here the man who had upon five different occasions come to her side, telling her that he had been waiting for her?

For ten days she remained in the house, looking forward day by day to some occurrence

that would cause her to realise what her dream meant; but she returned with her brother to Craven Court in disappointment. Nothing particular happened all the time, and she came to the conclusion that her dream was as meaningless as her brother had said it was.

Madge Craven and her brother were staying with the Tremaines at their own place during the pheasant shooting the following October, and one morning their hostess mentioned that her husband's cousin, Mrs Clifford, had returned to England from South America and was expected to join their party that day.

She arrived before the shooters had come back from their day's sport, and she and Mrs Tremaine had a long chat in front of the fire before tea. Mrs Clifford was a handsome old lady of the *grande dame* type; and being a close observer and an admirable describer of all that she observed, she was able to entertain Mrs Tremaine with an account of the adventures of her son and herself in South America.

"I hope Rawdon's health is more satisfactory now than it was," said Mrs Tremaine when her

guest had declared that there was no more to be told.

“I can only hope for the best,” said Mrs Clifford, becoming grave. “Rawdon is gone across the mountains to Chili, and will not be at home until the middle of January.”

“He must be pretty robust to be able to undertake such a journey,” said Mrs Tremaine.

“He is not wanting in strength,” said Mrs Clifford. “Only—poor boy!”

“‘Poor boy!’ ‘Why poor boy?’” asked the other.

There was a pause before the elder lady said—

“It is rather difficult to explain. By the way, did any of your party at the Manor House see the ghost?”

“Heavens! I did not know that your family was blessed with a ghost,” laughed Mrs Tremaine. “No, I can assure you, we were not so lucky. What sort of a ghost is it? A ghastly figure with rattling chains? Have you seen it?”

“Yes, I have seen it,” said Mrs Clifford in a low voice.

“How interesting! Do tell me what it is like!” cried the other.

“Like? What is it like?” Mrs Clifford rose slowly from her chair, and walked to another chair. She only remained seated for a moment, however: with a sigh she began pacing the room slowly.

“I fear I have touched upon a forbidden topic,” said Mrs Tremaine. “I had no idea that you were serious.”

“Serious—serious,” said Mrs Clifford. She was still pacing the room, and had just reached the window when she spoke. The next moment she had uttered a cry. Mrs Tremaine saw that she was staring out of the window, her hands grasping the back of a chair.

She was by her side in a moment.

“Pray, what is the matter?” she said. “You are weak—overcome by— Let me ring for brandy.”

Mrs Clifford clutched her suddenly by the arm.

“Who is that—that—on the terrace?” she said in a fearful whisper.

“Who? Why, that is our cousin, Madge Craven,” replied Mrs Tremaine.

Madge was standing on the terrace bare-headed, tossing grain to the peacocks.

"She was with you when you were at the Manor House," said Mrs Clifford. "She was there, and yet you did not see the 'ghost'?"

"What on earth do you mean?" said Mrs Tremaine.

"I mean this: that girl out there is the ghost that appears at the Manor House every Christmas Eve, and it is because my poor boy, as well as I myself, saw it, that his mind has become unhinged."

"Heavens! You mean to say——"

"The poor boy has fallen in love with a shadow—a phantom! It comes every Christmas Eve and walks from room to room. It comes up the stairs—I tell you that I have seen it—and sits on the old carved settee, and then suddenly vanishes into the air whence it came. . . . And that ghost is as surely that girl as I am I."

"This is terrible—quite uncanny! Are you quite sure?"

"Sure—sure!"

"It is awful to think upon. But—but—listen to me—I have an idea. If Madge is

the ghost, why not ask her down again to your place, and give Rawdon a thing of flesh and blood to transfer his affections to?"

"What do you say?"

"Madge is the best girl in the world. Every eligible man in her county, and quite as many ineligible, have wanted to marry her. You will find out how nice she is."

Mrs Clifford sank into the chair.

"Oh that it were possible!" she whispered. "He is everything to me, my dearest boy, and until this fancy—— Oh, if it were only possible!"

And at this point Madge entered the room, and was duly presented to Mrs Clifford.

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If Madge was at first under the impression that the manner of Mrs Clifford in regard to her was somewhat formal and constrained, before a week had passed she had good reason to change her opinion on this point. The fact was that Mrs Clifford had formed an attachment for her which she could sincerely return; and that was why the girl was delighted to accept her invitation to spend Christmas in

Dorsetshire. It suited her brother's arrangements for her to do so, for he was anxious to join a big-game expedition which was starting for India early in December.

Mrs Clifford said she was delighted to be able to have Madge all to herself for at least a fortnight.

"My son cannot possibly be home until the middle of January," said she, "and then we shall probably have a large party at the Manor. But meantime you and I shall be together."

"I do not think that we shall quarrel," said Madge.

"Alas ! alas !" said Mrs Clifford to Mrs Tremaine, after one of the many whispered colloquies which they had together during the week. "Alas ! Rawdon cannot be home for Christmas. It was I who took the greatest pains to arrange matters to prevent his spending another Christmas Eve at home until he should have completely recovered from the effects of his strange attachment, and yet now I would give worlds to be able to have him with us on Christmas Eve."

"Could you not send a cable ?" suggested Mrs Tremaine.

“I might send a dozen without being able to find him. Besides, it would be impossible for me to tell him what has occurred.”

“I suppose you could hardly cable him ‘Come home at once. Ghost found,’” laughed Mrs Tremaine. “Never mind. He should be all the better pleased when the Ghost of Christmas Eve becomes a creature of flesh and blood by the middle of January.”

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It was Christmas Eve at the Manor House. Madge's maid had just left her for the night, but the girl showed no inclination to go to bed. She remained sitting by her fire thinking how strange it was that she should be on this Christmas Eve in the flesh at the house which she had visited in her dreams. And while she sat thinking over this, she found herself overcome by that strange longing which she had had just a year ago, to be again by the side of the man who had come to her side in her dream.

She clasped her hands, saying in a whisper—

“Come to me. Come to me again and tell me that you have been waiting for me.”

She began to undress with feverish haste,

when suddenly her hands dropped by her sides, for the terrible thought occurred to her—

“What if my dream will not come to me this year because I happen to be in the midst of the real scene where it took place?”

The thought that it might be as capricious as other dreams oppressed her. She now felt sorry that she had agreed to visit the place. She should have remained at Craven Court, where her dream had always been faithful to her.

A sudden idea occurred to her: she would leave her room and sit in reality on the carved settee under the painted window, and then, going to bed immediately after, she might sink unconsciously into the kind embrace of her dream.

She opened her door very gently and went along the silent corridor until she reached the head of the staircase, and saw the moonlight streaming through the coloured glass to the lobby beneath. She stole down, and in another instant she was in the seat, the moonlight streaming over her and throwing the coloured pattern of the glass upon her white dress. She

closed her eyes, feeling that perhaps she might fall asleep and find herself in the midst of her dream.

Suddenly she opened her eyes. She fancied that she heard the sound of a footstep in the hall below. Yes, there could be no doubt about it. Some one was in the hall—some one was coming up the stairs. She sprang to her feet, and was about to rush up to her room, when she heard a voice—the voice that she had heard so often in that dream of hers, saying—

“Ah, do not go now. You cannot go now that I have come to you—now that I have been waiting for you for five years.”

She could not move from where she was standing. She saw a tall man with a bronzed face coming up the stairs. She somehow had never seen his face in her dream, but she recognised it from the photograph which his mother had shown her: she knew that the man was Rawdon Clifford.

He stood before her on the lobby.

“They thought to separate us,” he said. “They thought that my love for you was a form of madness. But I tell you, as I told

them, I would rather stand by your side for a few minutes once a-year than be for ever by the side of another—a more real creature. That is why I have come over land and sea to be here in time for your visit this Christmas Eve. I promised my mother to stay away; but I could not—I could not keep my promise, and I came to England a fortnight sooner than I expected, and entered the house only this moment—like a burglar. But I am rewarded.”

“I do not understand. I am Mrs Clifford’s guest. Madge Craven is my name,” said Madge.

The man sprang back and raised his hands in surprise.

“Great heavens! She is flesh and blood—at last—at last!” he cried.

He put out his hand slowly—doubtfully. Madge put out hers to it. A cry of delight came from him as he felt her warm hand, and he made it still warmer by his kisses. She could not stop him. She made no attempt to do so.

“Tell me that I was not mad—that I am not mad now,” he said in a loving whisper.

“Oh no—only—is it not strange?—For five years I have this dream—this very dream—and yet I never was in this house until last January,” said Madge.

“You have been with me every Christmas Eve for five years, and you will remain here for ever,” said he. “Do not tell me that we have not met before—do not tell me that you have not loved me as I have loved you all these years. What did that dream of yours mean?”

“I think I know now—now,” whispered the girl.

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Mrs Tremaine considers herself the only survivor of the people who professed to exorcise the ghosts in whom our grandfathers were foolish enough to believe.

THE BLOOD ORANGES.

“Ан, my friend,” said the Marchesa, “you Englishmen are like to our mountain which we see smoking over there.” She threw herself into the attitude of the *prima donna assoluta* in an impassioned moment preceding the singing of the *romanza*, as she pointed across the blue Bay of Naples to where Vesuvius was sending forth a delicate hazy fume.

“I don’t know anything about Englishmen,” said Sir Percival morosely; “but I know that when you are near me my heart is a volcano—my soul——”

The lady’s laugh interrupted him—one cannot make use of similes with a poetical flavour about them when a violet-eyed lady is leaning back her head in laughter, even though the action displays a beautiful throat and the curves of a superb neck. The Marchesa del

Grippo displayed a marvellous throat and neck, and was fully aware of this fact. Her laugh rang out like a soprano dwelling with delight on a high note and producing it *tremolo*.

“Ah,” she cried, “you are at pains to prove to me that I am right in the way I judge you Englishmen: to-day you are volcanic, to-morrow we find not the blaze and the thunder but only—*ecco!* a puff of smoke.”

Once again she pointed—but this time carelessly—in the direction of the mountain.

The man frowned.

“For heaven’s sake do not say ‘You Englishmen’ when I am by!” he cried. “I have nothing in common with Englishmen.”

“I have never met an Englishman who did not try to impress upon me that he was not as other Englishmen,” said the Marchesa. “The last one to say so to me was your wicked young Lord Byron. The Guicciola presented him to me at Genoa. Heavens! the old Count is more like an Englishman than Lord Byron! He can keep his eyes fast shut when it suits him. Enough; I said ‘You Englishmen,’ and he became red with anger. Droll! I had to

ask forgiveness for having accused his lordship of being English. Oh, you are a nation of patriots."

"You do not mean to keep up the acquaintance of Lord Byron, I would fain hope," said Sir Percival with another frown.

Again the lady laughed.

"After that do not tell me that you are not an Englishman," she said. "It is so very English to frown when the name of Lord Byron is mentioned—to give a young woman with a husband a solemn warning to beware of that wicked young noble, while all the time the one that utters the warning is doing his best to earn the reputation of the disreputable Byron. The English detest Byron; but if you want to flatter an Englishman to the farthest point, all you have to do is to tell him that you believe him to be a second Lord Byron. Never mind: I like the Lord Byron, and I like—yes, a little—another of his countrymen, though he is, I fear, very wicked."

"Wicked?—wicked?" cried Sir Percival—he was plainly flattered. "What is it to be wicked?"

“Ah, do not ask me to give it a definition : I might say that it was to be you — you yourself.”

“If it is wicked to love—madly—blindly—then indeed I admit that——”

“That you are *aut Diabolus, aut Byron*? I know not which of the two the English regard as the worse. Well, suppose I do not admit your right to tell me of your love : I suppose I dare not dispute your right to love, but I can dispute your right to tell me of it—that is, if it exists.”

“If it exists? Heavens! my beloved creature, would I have followed you here from England if I did not love you to distraction?”

“It needs such extraordinary self-sacrifice on the part of an Englishman to leave England for Italy! I think you were glad to make some excuse—even so feeble a one as that of being in love with an Italian woman—to make a journey to Naples. But I forgot; you were in Italy once before, were you not?”

“Yes; I was in some parts,—the north—Tuscany — Florence — never here — no, never here.”

“Never here? ah, yes; now I remember well.

You said you had never been to Sorrento. I wonder did I hold out any inducement to you to come to Sorrento?—you must have been studying a map of our bay, for you knew by name every landmark, every island, when I tried to be your cicerone just now.”

The glance that he cast at her after giving a little start had something of suspicion in it.

“Everyone knows the landmarks of the lovely Bay of Naples,” said he; “but I—ah, my beloved, did you not tell me all its beauties when we first met in London six months ago? Had you no idea that every word which fell from your lips—even the words in which you described the scenery around your home—should be burnt into my memory for evermore? Ah, sweet one, will you never listen to me? Does my devotion count for nothing with you?”

“My husband,” she whispered with a tremulous downward glance—the glance of love’s surrender—he knew it well: he was a man of considerable experience of woman in all her phases. He knew that he had not been fooled by the Marchesa.

“Did not you tell me that you detested him?” he cried. “If a husband treats a wife cruelly, as he has treated you, he has wilfully forfeited all claim to her devotion. There are some acts so atrocious that it is impossible to find an adequate punishment for them.”

“You think that even if the punishment were a crime in the eyes of the world it would be sanctified by heaven if it were meted out to a monster of cruelty?” The Marchesa was looking at him through half-closed eyes. He saw that her hands were clenched tightly, and he did not fail to notice how tumultuously her bosom was heaving. He was exultant. He had conquered. That opportune word which he had thrown in regarding her husband’s cruelty had overcome her last scruple.

She was his.

“My beloved—my beloved,” he whispered, “cruelty to such a woman as you makes sacred the mission of avenging it. You will leave him—with me you will never know aught save happiness.”

She gave a little laugh, and then put her

hand in his, not doubtfully, but with an expression of the amplest trustfulness.

“My last scruple is gone,” said she in the same low tone that he had employed. “What you have said has made my mind easy.”

“You will come to me?”

“Till one of us dies.”

She spoke the words with the fire flashing from her eyes as she gazed into his face. The force of that gaze of hers gave him a little shock. It was only a momentary sensation, however; in a second he recollected that he was talking to an Italian, not an Englishwoman.

“Till one of us dies—till one of us dies,” he whispered, poorly imitating her intensity. “Ah, I knew that it would come, my darling. Would I have travelled from England if I had not been certain of you—certain of my own love for you, I mean? And you will come with me—you will leave him? It is his punishment—his righteous punishment.”

“I shall leave him with you, I swear to you,” cried the Marchesa.

For a moment he failed to catch her exact meaning. He did not want the Marchese to

be left with him; but of course he perceived the next instant that she meant to say that she would leave her husband and go with him, her lover; and there was no tremor in his voice as he said—

“You will never repent it! Ah, what happiness will be ours, my soul! Shall it be to-morrow? I can hire a vessel to take us to Malta,—there we shall be safe.”

“Nay, it is too sudden,” said she. “My husband could not fail to have his suspicions aroused. Nay, we shall have to await our opportunity. If he asks you to pay us a visit you must come. He will be going to Rome in a day or two, and I shall contrive to be left behind.”

“Ah, that will be our chance,” he cried. “Fate is on our side, my dear one.”

“Yes, Fate is on our side,” she said in a low tone that could not possibly reach the ear of the tall and straight man who approached them as they stood at the balustrade of the Villa Galeotto overlooking the lovely Bay of Naples.

“It is such a great pleasure to me to meet

you once again, Sir Percival Cleave," said the Marchese, with a smile. "I hope that the Marchesa has offered you the hospitality of our humble home?"

"The Marchesa has been so very kind as suggest that I should visit your castle for an hour or two before I leave this lovely neighbourhood," said Sir Percival.

"Nay, surely she made you name the day," said the Marchese, turning to his wife. "Is it possible, my dear, that you failed to be more specific?" he asked with great gravity.

The lady gave a shrug in response, and her husband became still more grave.

"The hospitality which I received in England can never be forgotten by me, though my mission was an unpleasant one," said he. "The King of Naples—but we will avoid politics, as people must if they mean to remain good friends. Enough; you will honour us by paying us a visit—but when? What day will suit your convenience?"

"I am only remaining in this neighbourhood for a day or two," said Sir Percival. "I have, alas! some important business that will take

me northward; but—well, I have no engagement to-morrow, if that day would suit your Excellency.”

“It will suit me better than any other day,” replied the Marchese. “I have myself to go to Rome almost at once. I shall never cease to be thankful to Fate for having so delayed my departure as to enable me to have the pleasure of meeting Sir Percival Cleave. You will come in the afternoon and eat a simple dinner at our table. You are already acquainted with the road to the Castle?”

“Oh yes—that is, no; I do not know the road, but I do not suppose I shall have any difficulty in finding it out.”

“What!” the Marchese had turned once more to his wife and had assumed the tone of a reproof. “What! you did not make Sir Percival aware of the direction to the Castle?”

“Sir Percival has been studying a map of the Bay,” said she. “Though he has never before been here he shows a remarkable acquaintance with the neighbourhood.”

“It is not right to take so much for granted,” said the Marchese. “Allow me to

repair the negligence of the Marchesa, Sir Percival."

He then pointed out to the Englishman the direction to take in order to reach the road leading to the cliffs a mile beyond Sorrento, where the Castello del Grippo stood in the centre of its olive-groves. Sir Percival thanked him, and said that having received such plain directions he would not now carry out his intention of driving to the castle; he would ride there instead.

Before the Marchese and his wife took their departure, the latter had managed to whisper in the ear of Sir Percival as she returned the pressure of his hand—

"Without fail."

"Till one of us dies," he replied.

How strange it all was! he thought that night as he stood at the door of the inn where he was staying at Sorrento, and listened to the singing of the fishermen putting out to sea. How strange it all was! The seven years that had passed since he had last heard the hymn of the fishermen in that Bay seemed no more than so many days. He had had his

adventures since he had been so foolish as to fancy himself in love with Paolina — poor Paolina! A good many faces had interposed between the face of the Italian girl of 1815 and the face of the Italian Marchesa in 1822. But what a whimsical fate it was that had made him fall in love with the Marchesa del Grippo more deeply than he had ever permitted himself to fall in regard to other women! He had never known what it was to love before, though she was the woman whom he should have avoided, even if there were no other woman to love in the wide world.

Ah, it was fate—the Marchesa had said so that afternoon at the Villa Galeotto. She had loved him from the first—he was ready to swear to that. He remembered now certain indications of her passion which he had noticed the first evening they had met, but which had escaped his memory. It was at Lady Blessington's in Kensington, and the Marchesa had expressed the pleasure it gave her to meet with an Englishman who spoke such excellent Italian. He had been very cautious at that

time in replying to her questions as to the length of time he had been in Italy and the places that he had visited. It was not beyond the bounds of possibility that, after the lapse of seven years, any one might recognise him as the lover of Paolina, so it was just as well, he thought, to be careful. He had not mentioned a word about Sorrento, and not until the Marchesa had stood by his side in the garden of the Villa Galeotto had he lapsed in his feigning a complete ignorance of the locality. It was the force of his passion for that lovely woman which had overwhelmed him, causing him to forget himself and to refer by name to various landmarks.

But what did it matter now? The woman had responded to him, and in a day or two would be by his side for—well, for as long as he pleased. A short distance away Lord Byron was affording the Italians a new reading of the cold-blooded Englishman; but Sir Percival Cleave would take very good care that he was not made such a fool of by the Marchesa as Lord Byron was by the Contessa Guicciola. Byron was practically a pauper, whereas he,

Sir Percival Cleave, was rich. He could therefore (the logic was his) prevent himself from ever being made a fool of by any woman, Marchesa or Contessa though she might be.

But he loved her—of that he was certain. He had asked her if he would have faced the discomforts of a journey from England to Italy had he not been in love with her; and now as he stood listening to the fishermen's hymns sung in the boats that were drifting out of the Bay, he asked himself the same question. Oh yes, he loved her! and her husband was cruel to her—she had told him so in England, and she had been greatly comforted by his assurance—given in answer to her inquiry—that the crime of being cruel to her was so great as to condone any act of hers—say, running away with another man.

She was superstitious; she had some scruples. The priests, no doubt, were in the pay of her husband, and they had probably exaggerated the crime of a wife's leaving a husband,—it would be so like a greasy Italian priest to lay emphasis upon this one particular act; but he, an English gentleman to the core, and properly

sensible of the blessings of a Protestant king and constitution, had succeeded in counteracting the insidious teaching of the priests. She had listened to him. She had readily accepted that great truth : a woman's retaliation to her husband's cruelty is sanctified in the eyes of heaven. That was his point: the eyes of heaven. It was immaterial in what light such an act of retaliation as he suggested to her would appear in the eyes of the people of the world.

Before he slept he had brought himself to believe that he was actually the lady's honourable champion, boldly coming forward to rescue her from an intolerable oppressor.

The Castello del Grippo was built on the summit of the headland that sloped away from the sea at one side, but was very precipitous on the other. For three hundred years the family of Del Grippo had been accustomed to display a light in the tower nightly for the guidance of the fishing-boats, for the Castle could be seen from the north as well as the south. For more than a mile on the shoreward side of the Castle the olive-trees grew mixed with lemons and oranges ; and as Sir Percival rode along the

somewhat rough avenue on his way to accept the hospitality of the man whose wife he had the previous day been instructing on some interesting points in regard to her duty, he was entranced with the perfumes of the fruits and flowers. The air was heavy with odours of the citrons, and the gold of the luscious fruit gleamed among the glossy leaves. Though he had never been on the avenue before, the gleam of the fruit and the exquisite scents brought back to him the sweet memory of Paolina. It was not at this side of the great garden that he had been accustomed to meet her, but on the other side—that nearest the cliff, a mile away.

It was a sweet sad memory, and it was so poignant that it even caused him to sigh and murmur—

“Ah, la povera Paolina! la povera Paolina!”

And having thereby satisfied himself that his heart was as soft as the heart of a little child, he urged his horse forward.

He soon reached the Castle, and it seemed gloomy enough, outlined against the wonderful blue sky. He had seen numbers of the peasants

working among the olives, but close to the Castle none were in sight. It was not until he had dismounted and pulled the handle of the old iron bell that a servant appeared. In a few moments the Marchese himself came out of a room at one side of the hall and welcomed his guest, giving instructions to another servant to stable the horse.

“You have not met the Marchesa?” he inquired of Sir Percival. “She left the Castle half-an-hour ago, trusting to meet you. Pray enter and we shall have some refreshment.”

But Sir Percival declined to enter in the absence of the Marchesa. He felt that to do so would be very gross—to say the least of it. The idea of sitting down with the Marchese while the lady—his lady—was wandering disconsolately around the grounds in search of him was very repugnant to him.

“As you will,” said the Marchese with a shrug when he remarked that he would like to go in search of the Marchesa. “As you will. She is not likely to get lost. Oh yes; we shall go in search of her, and that will serve me as an excuse for showing you some

of the spots to which interest attaches within our grounds."

He picked up a hat and stick and left the Castle with his visitor.

"We shall first go to the grove where the historic duel was fought between my ancestor and the two nephews of Pope Adrian," said the Marchese. "You have heard of that affair, no doubt."

"Shall we be likely to find the Marchesa there?" asked Sir Percival.

"As likely as not we shall meet her as we go there," replied the Marchese.

He led the way through an avenue of ilex, and they soon came upon a cleared space at the foot of a terrace of rocks. The Marchese explained the position occupied by the combatants in the famous duel that had so consolidated the position of the family of Del Grippo. But all the time the details of the incident were being explained to him Sir Percival was casting his eyes around for the appearance of the lady. What did he care about Pope Adrian or his nephews so long as his lady—he had come to think of her as his lady—was roaming the grounds in search of him?

Then his host brought him to where the body of his grandfather had been found by the side of the three men whom he had killed before receiving the fatal blow from behind, dealt by that poltroon, Prince Roberto, who had hired four of his bravos to attack the old man. At another part of the grounds were the ruins of the ancient summer-house, where a certain member of this distinguished family had strangled his wife, whom he had suspected of infidelity, though, as the Marchese explained, the lady had saved him more than once from assassination and was perfectly guiltless.

An hour had been passed viewing these very interesting localities, about which the air of the middle ages still lingered, and still the Marchesa was absent.

“Should we not return to the Castle? the Marchesa may be waiting for us,” suggested Sir Percival.

“A thousand pardons,” cried the Marchese. I fear I have fatigued you. You are thirsty.”

“Well, yes ; I am somewhat thirsty,” laughed the visitor.

“How discourteous I have been ! We shall

have the refreshment of an orange before returning. There is a famous grove a short way toward the cliff."

He strode onward, and then, suddenly turning down a narrow path made among the olives, Sir Percival gave a start, for he found himself by the side of the Marchese, at the one part of those grounds with which he was well acquainted. They stood among the orange-trees at the summit of the cliff which he had nightly climbed to meet Paolina.

"Here are our choicest fruits," said the Marchese, plucking an orange and handing it to his visitor. "Break it open and you will see how exquisite the fruit is."

Sir Percival broke the orange, but the moment he did so it fell from his fingers and he gave a cry of horror, for out of the fruit had come a red stream staining his hands.

The Marchese laughed loud and long.

"Your hands are embrued with blood," he said. "Oh, a stranger might fancy for a moment that Sir Percival Cleave was a murderer. Ah! pray pardon my folly. That is only the refreshing juice of the orange. And yet you

fancied that it was blood! Come, my friend, take courage; here is another. Eat it; you will find it delicious. I have heard that there are in the world such strange monsters as are refreshed by drinking blood—we have ourselves vampires in this neighbourhood. But you and I, sir, we prefer only the heart's blood of a simple orange. You will eat one."

"I could not touch one," said Sir Percival.

"Nay; to do me the favour? What! an Englishman and superstitious?"

Sir Percival took another orange and made a pretence of eating it. His hands trembled so, however, they were soon dripping with the crimson juice.

"You are caught red-handed in the act," said the Marchese. "Red-handed. But the man who came here long ago was not so captured."

"Another medieval story?" said Sir Percival. "Had your Excellency not better reserve it for the evening?"

"This story is not a medieval one; and it can only be told on the spot," said the Marchese. "You have never been here before or you would not need to be told that this orange-grove was

until seven years ago an ordinary one. It was not until blood was spilt here seven years ago that the fruit became crimson when bruised, and blood—your hands are dyed with it—flowed from it as you have seen—it is on your lips—you have drunk of her blood—Paolina's."

"For God's sake let us leave this place!" said Sir Percival hoarsely. "I have heard enough stories of bloodshed."

"Nay; this one is so piteous, you shall hear it and weep, sir—ah! tears of blood might be drawn from the most hard-hearted at the story of Paolina. She was a sweet girl. She lived with her sister, who is now the Marchesa——"

"Good God!"

"What amazes you, sir? Is it remarkable that my wife should have had a sister?"

"No, no; of course not; I was only surprised to find those horrid marks still on my hands. Pray let us return to the Castle and permit me to remove the stains."

"Poor Paolina!—she lived at the Castle with our aunt seven years ago. She was a flower of girlhood. I thought myself in love with her;

but when my brother Ugo—he was the elder—confided in me that he loved her, I left the Castle. He loved her, and it seemed that she returned his affection. They were betrothed, and one could not doubt that their happiness was assured. But one evil day she met a man—a scoundrel; I regret to say that he was an Englishman—do not move, sir, you shall hear me out. This villain spoke to her of love. He tempted her. She was accustomed to meet him every evening on this very spot—we learned that he sailed from Sorrento and climbed the cliff. My brother began to suspect. He followed her here one evening, and she confessed everything to him. He was a passionate man, and he strangled her here—here—and then flung himself headlong from the cliff.”

“A gruesome story, Marchese. Now, shall we return?”

“Villain!—assassin!—look at your hands—they are wet with her blood—your lips—they have drunk her blood, but ’tis their last draught—for——”

Sir Percival sprang at the man and caught him by the throat, but in an instant his hands

relaxed. He had only strength to glance round. He saw the woman who had stabbed him, before he fell forward.

“That one was for her—for her—my beloved sister. This one is for our dear brother—the man whom you wronged. This——”

She stabbed him again. His blood mixed with the crimson stains on the earth.

“Look at it—bear witness that I have kept my oath,” cried the Marchesa. “Did not I swear that his blood should be drunk by the same earth that drank hers?”

“Beloved one, you are an angel—an avenging angel!” cried the Marchese, embracing his wife.

The next day Sir Percival Cleave’s horse was found dead at the foot of one of the cliffs; but the body of the “unfortunate baronet”—so he was termed by the newspapers (English)—was never recovered.

THE STRANGE STORY OF NORTHAVON PRIORY.

WHEN Arthur Jephson wrote to me to join his Christmas party at Northavon Priory, I was set wondering where I had heard the name of this particular establishment. I felt certain that I had heard the name before, but I could not recollect for the moment whether I had come upon it in a newspaper report of a breach of promise of marriage or in a Blue-Book bearing upon Inland Fisheries: I rather inclined to the belief that it was in a Blue-Book of some sort. I had been devoting myself some years previously to an exhaustive study of this form of literature; for being very young, I had had a notion that a Blue-Book education was essential to any one with parliamentary aspirations. Yes, I had, I repeat, been very young at that time, and I had not found out that

a Blue - Book is the *oubliette* of inconvenient facts.

It was not until I had promised Arthur to be with him on Christmas Eve that I recollected where I had read something about Northavon Priory, and in a moment I understood how it was I had acquired the notion that the name had appeared in an official document. I had read a good deal about this Priory in a curious manuscript which I had unearthed at Sir Dennis le Warden's place in Norfolk, known as Marsh Towers. The document, which, with many others, I found stowed away in a wall-cupboard in the great library, purported to be a draft of the evidence taken before one of the Commissions appointed by King Henry VIII. to inquire into the abuses alleged to be associated with certain religious houses throughout England. An ancestor of Sir Dennis's had, it appeared, been a member of one of these Commissions, and he had taken a note of the evidence which he had in the course of his duties handed to the King.

The parchments had, I learned, been preserved in an iron coffer with double padlocks,

but the keys had been lost at some remote period, and then the coffer had been covered over with lumber in a room in the east tower overlooking the moat, until an outbreak of fire had resulted in an overturning of the rubbish and a discovery of the coffer. A blacksmith had been employed to pick the locks, which he did with a sledge-hammer; but it was generally admitted that his energy had been wasted when the contents of the box were made known. Sir Dennis cared about nothing except the improvement of the breed of horses through the agency of race meetings, so the manuscripts of his painstaking ancestor were bundled into one of the presses in the library, some, however, being reserved by the intelligent housekeeper in the still-room to make jam-pot covers—a purpose for which, as she explained to me at considerable length, they were extremely well adapted.

I had no great difficulty in deciphering those that came under my hand, for I had had considerable experience of the tricks of early English writers; and as I read I became greatly interested in all the original “trustie

and well-beelou'd Sir Denice le Warden" had written. The frankness of the evidence which he had collected on certain points took away my breath, although I had been long accustomed to the directness with which some of the fifteenth-century people expressed themselves.

Northavon Priory was among the religious houses whose practices had formed the subject of the inquiry, and it was the summary of Sir Denice's notes regarding the Black Masses alleged to have been celebrated within its walls that proved so absorbing to me. The bald account of the nature of these orgies would of itself have been sufficient, if substantiated, to bring about the dissolution of all the order in England. The Black Mass was a pagan revel, the details of which were unspeakable, though their nature was more than hinted at by the King's Commissioner. Anything so monstrously blasphemous could not be imagined by the mind of man, for with the pagan orgie there was mixed up the most solemn rite of the Mass. It was celebrated on the night of Christmas Eve, and at the hour of midnight the cele-

bration culminated in an invocation to the devil, written so as to parody an office of the Church, and, according to the accounts of some witnesses, in a human sacrifice. Upon this latter point, however, Sir Denice admitted there was a diversity of opinion.

One of the witnesses examined was a man who had entered the Priory grounds from the river during a fearful tempest, on one Christmas Eve, and had, he said, witnessed the revel through a window to which he had climbed. He declared that at the hour of midnight the candles had been extinguished, but that a moment afterwards an awful red light had floated through the room, followed by the shrieks of a human being at the point of strangulation, and then by horrible yells of laughter. Another man who was examined had been a wood-cutter in the service of the Priory, and he had upon one occasion witnessed the celebration of a Black Mass; but he averred that no life was sacrificed, though he admitted that in the strange red light, which had flashed through the room, he had seen what appeared to be two men struggling

on the floor. In the general particulars of the orgie there was, however, no diversity of opinion, and had the old Sir Denice le Warden been anything of a comparative mythologist, he could scarcely fail to have been greatly interested in being brought face to face with so striking an example of the survival of an ancient superstition within the walls of a holy building.

During a rainy week I amused myself among the parchments dealing with Northavon Priory, and although what I read impressed me greatly at the time, yet three years of pretty hard work in various parts of the world had so dulled my memory of any incident so unimportant as the deciphering of a mouldy document that, as I have already stated, it was not until I had posted my letter to Arthur Jephson agreeing to spend a day or two with his party, that I succeeded in recalling something of what I had read regarding Northavon Priory.

I had taken it for granted that the Priory had been demolished when Henry had superintended the dissolution of the religious establishments throughout the country: I did not

think it likely that one with such a record as was embodied in the notes would be allowed to remain with a single stone on another. A moment's additional reflection admitted of my perceiving how extremely unlikely it was that, even if Northavon Priory had been spared by the King, it would still be available for visitors during the latter years of the nineteenth century. I had seen many red-brick "abbeyes" and "priories" in various parts of the country, not more than ten years old, inhabited mostly by gentlemen who had made fortunes in iron, or perhaps lard, which constitutes, I understand, an excellent foundation for a fortune. There might be, for all I knew, a score of Northavon Priories in England. Arthur Jephson's father had made his money by the judicious advertising of a certain oriental rug manufactured in the Midlands, and I thought it very likely that he had built a mansion for himself which he had called Northavon Priory.

A letter which I received from Arthur set my mind at rest. He explained to me very fully that Northavon Priory was a hotel built within the walls of an ancient religious house.

He had spent a delightful month fishing in the river during the summer,—I had been fishing in the Amazon at that time,—and had sojourned at the hotel, which he had found to be a marvel of comfort in spite of its picturesqueness. This was why, he said, he had thought how jolly it would be to entertain a party of his friends at the place during the Christmas week.

That explanation was quite good enough for me. I had a week or two to myself in England before going to India, and so soon as I recalled what I had read regarding Northavon Priory, I felt glad that my liking for Jephson had induced me to accept his invitation.

It was not until we were travelling together to the station nearest to the Priory that he mentioned to me, quite incidentally, that during the summer he had been fortunate enough to make the acquaintance of a young woman who resided in a spacious mansion within easy distance of the Priory Hotel, and who was, so far as he was capable of judging,—and he considered that in such matters his judgment was

worth something,—the most charming girl in England.

“I see,” I remarked before his preliminary panegyric had quite come to a legitimate conclusion—“I see all now: you haven’t the courage—to be more exact, the impudence—to come down alone to the hotel—she has probably a brother who is a bit of an athlete—but you think that Tom Singleton and I will form a good enough excuse for an act on your part which parents and guardians can construe in one way only.”

“Well, perhaps—— Hang it all, man, you needn’t attribute to me any motives but those of the purest hospitality,” laughed my companion. “Isn’t the prospect of a genuine old English Christmas—the Yule log, and that sort of thing—good enough for you without going any further?”

“It’s quite good enough for me,” I replied. “I only regret that it is not good enough for you. You expect to see her every day?”

“Every day? Don’t be a fool, Jim. If I see her more than four times in the course of the week—I think I should manage to see her

four times—I will consider myself exceptionally lucky.”

“And if you see her less than four times you will reckon yourself uncommonly unlucky?”

“O, I think I have arranged for four times all right: I’ll have to trust to luck for the rest.”

“What! you mean to say that the business has gone as far as that?”

“As what?”

“As making arrangements for meetings with her?”

My friend laughed complacently.

“Well, you see, old chap, I couldn’t very well give you this treat without letting her know that I should be in the neighbourhood,” said he.

“Oh, indeed. I don’t see, however, what the——”

“Great heavens! You mean to say that you don’t see—— Oh, you will have your joke.”

“I hope I will have one eventually; I can’t say that I perceive much chance of one at present, however. You’ll not give us much of

your interesting society during the week of our treat, as you call it."

"I'll give you as much of it as I can spare—more than you'll be likely to relish, perhaps. A week's a long time, Jim."

"‘Time travels at divers paces with divers persons,’ my friend. I suppose she's as lovely as any of the others of past years?"

"As lovely! Jim, she's just the——"

"Don't trouble yourself over the description. I have a vivid recollection of the phrases you employed in regard to the others. There was Lily, and Gwen, and Bee, and—yes, by George! there was a fourth; her name was Nelly, or——"

"All flashes in the pan, my friend. I didn't know my own mind in those old days; but now, thank heaven!—Oh, you'll agree with me when you see her. This is the real thing and no mistake."

He was good enough to give me a genuine lover's description of the young woman, whose name was, he said, Sylvia St Leger; but it did not differ materially from the descriptions which had come from him in past days, of

certainly four other girls for whom he had, he imagined, entertained a devotion strong as death itself. Alas! his devotion had not survived a single year in any case.

When we arrived at the hotel, after a drive of eight miles from the railway station, we found Tom Singleton waiting for us rather impatiently, and in a quarter of an hour we were facing an excellent dinner. We were the only guests at the hotel, for though it was picturesquely situated on the high bank of the river, and was doubtless a delightful place for a sojourn in summer, yet in winter it possessed few attractions to casual visitors.

After dinner I strolled over the house, and found, to my surprise, that the old walls of the Priory were practically intact. The kitchen was also unchanged, but the great refectory was now divided into four rooms. The apartments upstairs had plainly been divided in the same way by brick partitions; but the outer walls, pierced with narrow windows, were those of the original Priory.

In the morning I made further explorations, only outside the building, and came upon the

ruins of the old Priory tower; and then I perceived that only a small portion of the original building had been utilised for the hotel. The landlord, who accompanied me, was certainly no antiquarian. He told me that he had been "let in" so far as the hotel was concerned. He had been given to understand that the receipts for the summer months were sufficiently great to compensate for the absence of visitors during the winter; but his experience of one year had not confirmed this statement, made by the people from whom he had bought the place, and he had come to the conclusion that, as he had been taken in in the transaction, it was his duty to try to take in some one else in the same way.

"I only hope that I may succeed, sir," he said, "but I'm doubtful about it. People are getting more suspicious every day."

"You weren't suspicious, at any rate," said I.

"That I weren't—more's the pity, sir," said he. "But it'll take me all my time to get the place off my hands, I know. Ah, yes; it's hard to get people to take your word for anything nowadays."

For the next two days Tom Singleton and I were left a good deal together, the fact being that our friend Arthur parted from us after lunch and only returned in time for dinner, declaring upon each occasion that he had just passed the pleasantest day of his life. On Christmas Eve he came to us in high spirits, bearing with him an invitation from a lady who had attained distinction through being the mother of Miss St Leger, for us to spend Christmas Day at her house—it had already been pointed out to us by Arthur: it was a fine Georgian country house, named The Grange.

“I’ve accepted for you both,” said Arthur. “Mrs St Leger is a most charming woman, and her daughter—I don’t know if I mentioned that she had a daughter—well, if I omitted, I am now in a position to assure you that her daughter—her name is Sylvia—is possibly the most beautiful—— But there’s no use trying to describe her; you’ll see her for yourselves to-morrow, and judge if I’ve exaggerated in the least when I say that the world does not contain a more exquisite creature.”

“Yes, one hour with her will be quite sufficient to enable us to pronounce an opinion on that point,” laughed Tom.

We remained smoking in front of the log fire that blazed in the great hearth, until about eleven o'clock, and then went to our rooms upstairs, after some horse-play in the hall.

My room was a small one at the beginning of the corridor, Arthur Jephson's was alongside it, and at the very end of the corridor was Tom Singleton's. All had at one time been one apartment.

Having walked a good deal during the day, I was very tired, and had scarcely got into bed before I fell asleep.

When I awoke it was with a start and a consciousness that something was burning. A curious red light streamed into the room from outside. I sprang from my bed in a moment and ran to the window. But before I had reached it the room was in darkness once more, and there came a yell of laughter, apparently from the next room.

For a moment I was paralysed. But the next instant I had recovered my presence of

mind. I believed that Arthur and Tom had been playing some of their tricks upon me. They had burnt a red light outside my window, and were roaring with laughter as they heard me spring out of bed.

That was the explanation of what I had seen and heard which first suggested itself to me; and I was about to return to bed when my door was knocked at and then opened.

“What on earth have you been up to?” came the voice of Arthur Jephson. “Have you set the bed-curtains on fire? If you have, that’s nothing to laugh at.”

“Get out of this room with your larking,” said I. “It’s a very poor joke that of yours, Arthur. Go back to your bed.”

He struck a light—he had a match-box in his hand—and went to my candle without a word. In a moment the room was faintly illuminated.

“Do you mean to say that you hadn’t a light here just now—a red light?” he cried.

“I had no light: a red light floated through the room, but it seemed to come from outside,” said I.

“And who was it laughed in that wild way?”

“I took it for granted that it was you and Tom who were about your usual larks.”

“Larks! No, I was about no larks, I can promise you. Good Lord! man, that laugh was something beyond a lark.” He seated himself on my bed. “Do you fancy it may have been some of the servants going about the stables with a carriage-lamp?” he continued. “There may have been a late arrival at the hotel, you know.”

“That’s not at all unlikely,” said I. “Yes, it may have been that, and the laughter may have been between the grooms.”

“I don’t hear any sound of bustle through the house or outside,” said he.

“The stables are not at this angle of the building,” said I. “We must merely have seen the light and heard that laughter as the carriage passed our angle. Anyhow, we’ll only catch cold if we lounge about in our pyjamas like this. You’d best get back to bed and let me do the same.”

“I don’t feel much inclined to sleep, but

I'll not prevent your having your night's rest," said he, rising. "I wonder is it near morning?"

I held the candle before the dial of my watch that hung above my bed.

"It's exactly five minutes past twelve," said I. "We've slept barely an hour."

"Then the sooner I clear out the better it will be for both of us," said he.

He went away slowly, and I heard him strike a match in his own room. He evidently meant to light his candle.

Some hours had passed before I fell into an uneasy sleep, and once more I was awakened by Arthur Jephson, who stood by my bedside. The morning light was in the room.

"For God's sake, come into Tom's room!" he whispered. "He's dead!—Tom is dead!"

I tried to realise his words. Some moments had elapsed before I succeeded in doing so. I sprang from my bed and ran down the corridor to the room occupied by Tom Singleton. The landlord and a couple of servants were already there. They had burst in the door.

It was but too true: our poor friend lay on

his bed with his body bent and his arms twisted as though he had been struggling desperately with some one at his last moment. His face, too, was horribly contorted, and his eyes were wide open.

“A doctor,” I managed to say.

“He’s already sent for, sir,” said the landlord.

In a few moments the doctor arrived.

“Cardiac attack,” said he. “Was he alone in the room? No, he can’t have been alone.”

“He was quite alone,” said Arthur. “I knocked at the door a quarter of an hour ago, but getting no answer, I tried to force the lock. It was too strong for me ; but the landlord and the man-servant who was bringing us our hot water burst in the door at my request.”

“And the window—was it fastened?” asked the doctor.

“It was secure, sir,” said the landlord.

“Ah, a sudden cardiac attack,” said the doctor.

There was, of course, an inquest, but as no evidence of foul play was forthcoming, the doctor’s phrase “cardiac attack” satisfied the

jury, and a verdict of "Death from natural causes" was returned.

Before I went back to town I examined the room in which our poor friend had died. On the side of one of the window-shutters there were four curious burnt marks. They gave one the impression that the shutter had at one time been grasped by a man wearing a red-hot gauntlet.

I started for India before the end of the year and remained there for eight months. Then I thought I would pay a visit to a sister of mine in Queensland. On my return at the end of the year I meant to stop at Cairo for a few weeks. On entering Shepheard's Hotel I found myself face to face with Arthur Jephson and his wife—he called her Sylvia. They had been married in August, but their honeymoon seemed still to be in its first quarter. It was after Mrs Jephson had retired, and when Arthur was sitting with me enjoying the cool of the night by the aid of a pretty strong cigar or two, that we ventured to allude to the tragic occurrence which marked our last time of meeting.

"I wish to beg of you not to make any allusion to that awful business in the hearing of my wife," said Arthur. "In fact I must ask you not to allude to that fearful room in the Priory in any way."

"I will be careful not to do so," said I. "You have your own reasons, I suppose, for giving me this warning."

"I have the best of reasons, Jim. She too had her experience of that room, and it was as terrible as ours."

"Good heavens! I heard nothing of that. She did not sleep in that room?"

"Thank God, she didn't. I arrived in time to save her."

I need scarcely say that my interest was now fully aroused.

"Tell me what happened—if you dare tell it," I said.

"You were abroad, and so you wouldn't be likely to hear of the fire at The Grange," said my friend, after a pause.

"I heard nothing of it."

"It took place only two days before last Christmas. I had been in the south of France, where I had spent a month or two with my

mother,—she cannot stand a winter at home,—and I had promised Sylvia to return to The Grange for Christmas. When I got to Northavon I found her and her mother and their servants at the Priory Hotel. The fire had taken place the previous night, and they found the hotel very handy when they hadn't a roof of their own over their heads. Well, we dined together, and were as jolly as was possible under the circumstances until bedtime. I had actually said 'Good night' to Sylvia before I recollected what had taken place the previous Christmas Eve in the same house. I rushed upstairs, and found Sylvia in the act of entering the room—that fatal room. When I implored of her to choose some other apartment, she only laughed at first, and assured me that she wasn't superstitious; but when she saw that I was serious—I was deadly serious, as you can believe, Jim——”

“ I can—I can.”

“ Well, she agreed to sleep in her mother's room, and I went away relieved. So soon as I returned to the fire in the dining-room I began to think of poor Tom Singleton. I felt curiously excited, and I knew that it would be useless for

me to go to bed,—in fact, I made up my mind not to leave the dining-room for some hours, at any rate, and when the landlord came to turn out the lights I told him he might trust me to do that duty for him. He left me alone in the room about half-past eleven o'clock. When the sound of his feet upon the oaken stairs died away I felt as fearful as a child in the dark. I lit another cigar and walked about the room for some time. I went to the window that opened upon the old Priory ground, and, seeing that the night was a fine one, I opened the door and strolled out, hoping that the cool air would do me good. I had not gone many yards across the little patch of green before I turned and looked up at the house—at the last window, the window of that room. A fire had been lighted in the room early in the evening, and its glow shone through the white blind. Suddenly that faint glow increased to a terrific glare,—a red glare, Jim,—and then there came before my eyes for a moment the shadow of two figures upon the blind,—one the figure of a woman, the other—God knows what it was. I rushed back to the room, but before I had reached the door

I heard the horrible laughter once again. It seemed to come from that room and to pass on through the air into the distance across the river. I ran upstairs with a light, and found Sylvia and her mother standing together with wraps around them at the door of the room. 'Thank God, you are safe!' I managed to cry. 'I feared that you had returned to the room.' 'You heard it—that awful laughter?' she whispered. 'You heard it, and you saw something—what was it?' I gently forced her and her mother back to their room, for the servants and the landlord's family were now crowding into the corridor. They, too, had heard enough to alarm them."

"You went to the room?"

"The scene of that dreadful morning was repeated. The door was locked on the inside. We broke it in and found a girl lying dead on the floor, her face contorted just as poor Singleton's was. She was Sylvia's maid, and it was thought that, on hearing that her mistress was not going to occupy the room, she had gone into it herself on account of the fire which had been lighted there."

“And the doctor said——?”

“Cardiac attack—the same as before—singular coincidence! I need scarcely say that we never slept again under that accursed roof. Poor Sylvia! She was overwhelmed at the thought of how narrow her escape had been.”

“Did you notice anything remarkable about the room—about the shutters of the window?” I asked.

He looked at me curiously for a moment. Then he bent forward and said—

“On the edge of the shutter there were some curious marks where the wood had been charred.”

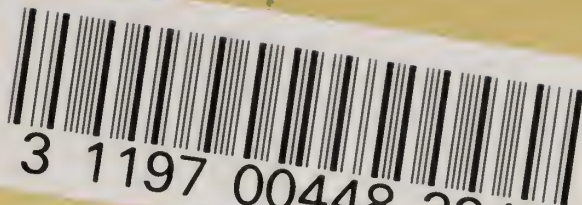
“As if a hand with a red-hot gauntlet had been laid upon it?”

“There were the marks of two such hands,” said my friend slowly.

We remained for an hour in the garden; then we threw away the ends of our cigars and went into the hotel without another word.







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